CORONET

Romance and intrigue surround a young girl's attempt to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena

told with *'all the lightness of Georgette Heyer'**

JANE AIKEN HODGE

Savannah Purchase

SAVANNAH PURCHASE

Set in the deep south of the early nineteenth century, when rich planters had a civilisation all their own, this is a novel of romantic suspense which blends intrigue and comedy against the vivid background of Savannah history.

Cousins who might be twins, Juliet and Josephine are separated by the Battle of Waterloo, to meet again, four years later, on a desolate bluff by the Savannah River. Both are orphans now, but Juliet is penniless, while Josephine has made a marriage of convenience with a rich Savannah planter, Hyde Purchis. Each, in her own way is desperate, and when Josephine proposes that Juliet play, once more, their childhood game of impersonation, she agrees, though with grave forebodings. She will take her cousin's place, deceiving even her estranged husband, while Josephine tries a mad gamble to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena.

Plunged into the social whirl of Savannah, or on the great plantation of Winchelsea, Juliet finds the stakes higher than she had understood, and realises, all too soon, just how little Josephine has really told her. Beset by strangers who may be friends, enemies, or even lovers, she is compelled to play out the dangerous masquerade, herself in the dark. Honour and life itself are at stake, and not just her own. Entertaining her guests in the great house in Oglethorpe Square, or dancing with the President of the United States, she is aware, always, of disaster looming for them all.

Also by the same author

Maulever Hall
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Savannah Purchase

Jane Aiken Hodge

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To Savannah, beautiful city,
and all my friends there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

IT IS hard to know where to begin my thanks to all the Savannah friends who helped me with this book. But I think I should start, as the book did, in Mrs. A. J. Waring, Jr.'s library of Savanniana, where she bravely let me loose, and even allowed trans-Atlantic borrowing. Mrs. Lilla M. Hawes of the Georgia Historical Society was kindness itself throughout, and actually had the painters' dust-sheets removed from her library so that my sister (to whom I am also indebted) could check a point for me. Mrs. Prior of the South Carolina Historical Society helped me, at short notice, with a wealth of information from their magazine, and Mrs. Nancy Stevenson took time out from her own writing to show me over her splendid 'Charleston Single' house.

Miss Beth Lattimore of Historic Savannah took me round the wreck of the Scarborough house by torchlight. It is good to know that this beautiful house, where President Monroe stayed, is now in process of restoration, through the good offices of Historic Savannah, many of whose members showed me round their fine old houses and those of their friends. Judge Alexander A. Lawrence generously took time off from his more serious affairs to help me over a series of problems that stuck me, here in England.

As to books, Savannah and I have been lucky in her historians, and I was particularly fortunate in having Miss Isabelle Harrison of the Little House Bookshop to guide me among them. *Anchored Yesterdays* by Mrs. Craig Barrow and Mrs. Malcolm Bell proved an historical novelist's goldmine, and so were Malcolm Bell, Jr.'s *Savannah Ahoy!* and Walter C. Hartridge's edition of the *Mackay Letters*. Mr. E. Merton Coulter's two books, *Wormsloe* and *Georgia, A Short History*,

were invaluable, while Mrs. Sieg kindly lent me her own copy of her article on the Jewish graveyard from the *Savannah Morning News Magazine*.

But this is becoming a mountain of bibliography for a poor ha'porth of historical novel. I will spare you the rest, but must add, in case it should need saying, that Winchelsea is not Wormsloe, though I hope it may constitute some kind of inadequate tribute to the civilisation preserved there. And, finally, if by mischance I have happened to use, or misuse, any family name, I can only humbly apologise and say it was by accident, not design.

JANE AIKEN HODGE

PROLOGUE

THE wind came first, out of a black sky. Standing on the edge of the bluff, Juliet watched the foaming water of the Savannah river rise steadily higher. The tide would not change for some hours yet. Had she moored her ramshackle boat securely, and on a long enough rope? Too late now, if not. It would be madness to venture down over the sliding sand of the bluff in this wind. The Minister had thought her mad anyway, not to go back to Ruffton with him after her father's funeral, but how could she, when her cousin would look for her here?

If Josephine would only come! No more hope today. The first scattering of huge raindrops sent her hurrying back to the house to light the temperamental old lamp before it was full dark. 'Not a soul for miles.' The Minister had been at once disapproving, and, she knew, relieved to be clear of her so easily. Her last few dollars, paid for the pitifully brief funeral, had, quite obviously, not been enough. Her shabby grey dress had shocked him as much as her solitary state. Their one servant had run, of course, after her father died. Just as well: she could not have paid her.

The wind was still rising, its voice hardly distinguishable from the roar of the river; rain beat savagely against the windows. Thank God, they were cracked, not broken. The vine outside tapped at them with desperate fingers. Lost souls trying to get in? Father? Ridiculous. She rose to trim the lamp, then stood, stock-still, petrified, at a new sound from outside. This was the wail of a lost soul indeed, an inhuman ululation, the voice of a devil in torment. It paused, rose to a further shriek, paused again. Sweat was running down her cold face. Her hand, as she made herself adjust the lamp,

trembled so much that she was afraid she would put it out.

An interval of comparative silence, with only the roaring of wind and water gave her time to collect herself. Someone had told her about this, back in New Orleans. It was the bamboo canes rubbing against each other in the wind. It terrified the slaves, the man had said, laughing, and moving his quid of tobacco to the other cheek.

It terrified her. Nerves exacerbated by the long, wretched months since they left France screamed for relief, for hysteria, for a great letting go of all the tension that had built up in her since her mother died. Suppose she started to scream like that banshee voice outside, would she ever stop?

CHAPTER ONE

'Juliette!' Sun shone from a cloudless sky as Josephine came up over the edge of the bluff, full muslin skirts carelessly sweeping the sand.

'Josephine!' A week's terrors gone in an instant, she hurried forward across the desolation that had once been a garden. Then, 'I call myself Juliet now. It's easier.'

'Yes.' After the first quick, warm kiss, they stood for a moment, handfast, gazing at each other as at a mirror. Then Josephine stepped back, still gazing at her cousin, and gave a little sigh of relief. 'We're alike as ever.'

'Except in fortune.' Juliet's voice was dry, her English perhaps a little purer than that of her cousin, who spoke still with a marked, delightful French accent.

'I know. Poor Uncle Charles; I am so sorry.' She spoke mechanically, her eyes leaving the other girl now to dart this way and that about the bluff. 'You're all alone here?'

'Yes. I told you in my letter. The servant left when father died. Well,' her shrug was gallic, 'there was no money. I can tell you, Jo, I was at my wits' end when I saw the notice of your arrival in that old copy of the *Savannah Georgian*.' And then, quickly. 'Mind, I won't be a charge on you a moment longer than I can help. If you'll but find me some decent employment . . . It should be easy enough with your connections.'

'A charge!' Josephine interrupted her. 'You, child? What lunacy is this? We were to be better than sisters, remember? We vowed it the day we parted. Lord, what an age ago, and what a monstrous deal we have to say to each other. But,

Ju—' Her eyes came back from that anxious scanning of the sun-browned bluff, and more distant view of autumn-golden reeds beyond the dark water. 'The sun's killing me. May we not go in?' She moved a little towards the house that stood behind them on the bluff. Surprisingly large, it must once have been a planter's mansion, but was now so old, so tumble-down, so neglected that it was hard to tell whether it supported its crown of green and golden vine, or the vine it.

Again that gallic shrug. 'If you wish. I'm beyond being ashamed of it. And it's clean at least. But why not the shade, over there?' She pointed to the garden's one large tree, a huge magnolia, richly green against the surrounding reds and golds of autumn.

'I'd rather go in.' When she spoke this, definitely, it was apparent that Josephine was somewhat the senior of the two girls. Already, she was re-establishing an old domination.

'I only wish I had anything to offer you.' Juliet turned to lead the way towards the vine-covered house.

'Nothing? What a fool I am. Wait!' She turned with a swish of muslin and called an order down to where her boat waited below the bluff. 'We'll have a picnic,' she told Juliet. 'If you've the table, I've the food. It will be like the old days, at Fontainebleau.' And then, as two Negroes came up over the bluff, carrying a large basket. 'That's right, boys, bring it in here, and then back to the boat, and, if you see anyone, pretend you don't.'

'Reckon we won't.' The older of the two stopped for a moment to gaze from one girl to the other. 'Man, did you ever see the like! Your sister, ma'am?'

'My cousin.' Impatiently. 'Now, hurry, Satan! Leave the basket; find yourselves some shade and eat your own. I won't be needing you this hour or more. Ah, that's better.' She looked round the gloomy little room into which Juliet had ushered them. Its windows had long since been covered by the all-invading vine, and the light, such as it was, filtered in, coolly

green, through leaves. As Juliet had said, the place was scrupulously clean, and pitifully bare, but a battered table stood ready to receive the picnic basket.

'Slaves!' Juliet had waited till the men had withdrawn to voice her distaste.

'Nothing of the kind.' Josephine was busy opening the basket. 'My husband won't have them,' she explained over her shoulder. 'I don't know how he managed, but he contrived to get on the shady side of the law, and free them. Only of course then they said they were better off with him than anywhere else. Which they are. *Mon dieu*, when you think what he pays them! And schooling for the children, too, but don't for God's sake, mention that!' She had finished her unpacking. 'Here, pet! Our own cherry bounce.' She filled a glass. 'And cold game pie to eat with it. Now I come to think of it, I'm hungry too.' Tactfully, she made a little business of settling herself on one of the room's two stools while her cousin cleaned her first plateful with a kind of elegant desperation.

At last Juliet looked up. 'I finished the last of the food yesterday,' she said. 'I was beginning to be afraid you were away, Jo.'

'We were.' Josephine had quietly refilled the plate. 'At Winchelsea – Hyde's plantation down river,' she explained.

'Mr. Purchis.' Juliet was eating more slowly now. 'Your husband. Just think of your having a husband, Jo! Do you remember how we used to talk? But, quick, tell me all about him. He won't have slaves! I like him already.'

'You'll like him better still when you meet him.' Something odd about Josephine's voice. 'Everyone adores him. I was lucky not to get my eyes scratched out by the Georgia —' she hesitated for a word '— ladies, when he brought me back from France.'

'France!' Juliet's colour was rising. Her dark eyes sparkled and she threw unruly auburn curls impatiently back over her shoulder. 'Tell me of France! When did you come away?'

'This spring. And not before it was time! Even Hyde, who is patience itself, could bear no more of the Bourbon tyranny. Yes!' she went on angrily, as if arguing with an invisible opponent, 'I said tyranny. Napoleon was a force for freedom, for progress! What is it they say of Louise the Undesirable?' He's learned nothing and forgotten nothing. It's true!'

'I expect so.' Juliet had finished her third plate of game pie and did not sound much interested. 'But tell me, Jo, what of your parents? How are they? And how did you come to marry Mr. Purchis?'

'*Maman et papa?*' Josephine lapsed momentarily into French. Then, in her pretty English, 'Father was killed at Waterloo. No, don't cry, pet. It's what he'd have wanted. And mother — I think she died of grief. And of hiding.'

'Hiding?'

'You don't know, do you? Your father was wise; he saw trouble coming when Napoleon escaped from Elba. He got out quick.'

'Yes,' Juliet looked back sombrely over the years. 'It killed my mother.'

'To part from her twin. I know. Well,' her shrug was the image of her cousin's. 'Poor darlings, they should have thought of that, your mamma and mine, when they married one a Frenchman and one an American. It was sure to end in tears. Your mother died of the voyage, and mine of grieving. And your father?'

'Of failure, I think. He had learned to care for the wrong things, all those years in France. Poor father. There was to have been a fortune in Spanish Florida, then one in New Orleans — And here I am.'

'Yes, but why here? And how?' There was unexpected force, now, behind Josephine's questions.

'Oh, because of a friend.' Juliet spoke wearily. 'Papa always had friends, you know. When New Orleans was a disaster, too,

this latest friend said we could use his house here, you see? So — we came here.'

'But how?' Again that odd intensity. 'By way of Savannah?'

'Oh, no. We had to get out so fast because of papa's debts. There was a boat leaving for Charleston. We came there, then overland.' She shivered a little. 'Papa was ill already. I think the journey killed him. Or started him dying.'

'Poor Uncle Charles.' Again, it sounded mechanical. 'So you've never been to Savannah?'

'I've never crossed the river. Never been anywhere in Georgia. And I never want to!'

'Oh, my poor pet! But we're going to change all that.' She refilled her cousin's glass. 'You've no idea how happily you've arrived for me! I've work for you, Ju, if you'll but do it.'

'Work?' Eagerly. 'Already! Oh, bless you, Jo, I was right. I knew my luck would change when I found you. But what is it? When do I start?'

'Now. This minute.' Josephine had risen and was looking about the room. 'Have you such a thing as a looking-glass in this palace of yours, pet? We must be sure, before we start.'

'Sure? What do you mean? But, yes, there's an old glass in my bedroom. It's about all there is. I'm ashamed to have you find me thus.'

'Fiddlestick,' said her cousin. 'You should have seen me when Mr. Purchis found *me*.' Her eyes filled with tears. 'He's been wonderfully good to me.' She answered Juliet's look of surprise.

'Who wouldn't be!' Even on the day they parted, Juliet had never seen Josephine cry before. The tears, at once touching and surprising, washed away the last hint of reserve, she had felt at the contrast between their positions. What matter if she was shabby almost beyond respectability, while everything about Josephine, from exquisite ringlets to tiny kid slippers, showed the most expensive kind of imported elegance? They

were cousins, had always felt like sisters in those happy days before Waterloo when they lived with their twin mothers at Fontainebleau, while Josephine's French father followed Napoleon's fortunes and Juliet's American one followed the will-o'-the-wisp that was to be his own.

'Three years.' She finished the plum cake Josephine had handed her. 'It's a long time.'

'And makes no difference at all. Thank God.' Josephine meant it. 'But, come, pet, where's this looking-glass of yours?'

'Here.' Juliet led the way into a tiny room at the back of the house. 'I suppose it was so old, and so cumbersome, the last people couldn't be bothered to take it away.'

'I don't wonder.' It was lighter in here, since some effort had been made to remove the vine-leaves from outside the window, and gold-green afternoon sunshine angled in to show up the faded gilding and mildewed patches of a huge standing-glass that took up the greater part of one wall. 'It must have been magnificent when it was new. A bridegift, do you think?' She said it, Juliet thought, almost wistfully, and again she felt an unfamiliar surge of sympathy for the older cousin who had been apt, in that vanished past, to domineer over her somewhat on the strength of her three years' seniority. Now, she submitted without demur as Josephine took her hand and pulled her forward to face the glass. 'Yes,' it was almost a purr of satisfaction. 'As like as ever. Amazing, isn't it? I hardly dared hope—'

'Hope? But why? Take me with you, Jo. I don't understand.'

'Of course not, pet. But you will, soon enough. Your hair's all wrong of course, and you've a most unladylike tan, but apart from that, could you tell the difference?'

'And a small matter of the clothes.' Juliet made a little face as she studied the two reflections.

'Yes. You may need a little lacing to get into mine. You

always were disgustingly healthy, weren't you, pet? But never mind; we've plenty of time.You'll just have to stay here, that's all.'

'Stay here!' Horrified. 'But Jo, you said you had work for me!'

'And so I have. I told you. It begins right here, today.' A quick look at the jewelled watch she wore pinned to her dress. 'Yes, there's time. You won't mind being left alone just a little while? It's not an hour's row from here to Winchelsea. We'll be back long before dusk. With everything you need. And Anne to keep you company. Lord, how she'll cry! She never did like me above half so well as you. She drizzled like a fountain after you left for America.'

'Anne! She's with you still!'

'Well, I should think so. I'm not quite a fool. A faithful nurse, and French at that! She was about all that made my plight respectable, when Hyde found me. But I'll tell you about that some other time. Along with a million other things you'll need to know.' Her dark eyes flashed. 'What a game it's going to be! Just like old times. Do you remember? At the Convent. They never could tell, those poor, kind sisters. You'll do it, won't you, Ju? For me? And, of course, for money. As if that mattered. What's mine is yours anyway, but you'll like to feel you've earned it. You see, I remember what a stiff-necked little idiot you were.' There was a faint note of anxiety in her voice now. 'You'll do it for me, won't you?' Again, pleadingly. 'I can't tell you how badly I need you.'

'To act your part? As we used to? But why, Josephine?' The use of the full name was a bad sign. 'And who am I supposed to deceive?'

'Why, everyone! That's the cream of it. All those worthy Savannahians who look at me askance. "Mr. Purchis's French wife. Such a surprise!" ' Her mimicry of the southern accent was perfect. 'It'll be childs' play, too,' she hurried on. 'We've only been here a few weeks, after all. Of course, it will be a

little longer by the time you are ready to take over, but in the meantime I'll make a point of absent-mindedness. After all, why should I trouble to tell one of them from the other? I know I find each one more tedious than the last. And their idea of entertainment! Well, you must know from New Orleans, though in fact I've always heard that the French influence there was such that life is almost civilised.'

'Gaming hells and brothels,' said Juliet succinctly. 'It suited my father to a nicety.' And then, 'Shame on me! Poor father . . .'

But her cousin had dissolved into laughter. 'You were always a dark horse, Ju. Gaming hells and brothels indeed. Don't let old Anne hear you talk like that, or she'll wash your mouth out with soap and water.' She kissed her, suddenly and warmly. 'It's so *good* to see you, Miss Graveairs. And to find you've your old sharp tongue, too. Don't tell me you won't enjoy fooling the worthy merchants of Savannah, for I won't believe you.'

'But why, Josephine? First you must tell me that.'

'Come back into the other room.' Josephine led the way and refilled their glasses. 'I'd meant to lie to you,' she said abruptly. 'To tell you some rigmarole about debt, or a lover, or — oh,' impatiently, 'God knows what! I was waiting till I saw you. Now, I can see, it won't do, will it?'

'No.' Uncompromising.

'No. So — ' She lifted her glass. 'Here's to the truth. And success. You don't drink?'

'Not till I know what this truth of yours is.'

'Idiot! Knowing me, you should have guessed long since. What but Napoleon!'

'Napoleon? But he's on St. Helena.'

'Precisely. And we're here, in Savannah, as near to him as anyone else in the civilised world.'

'You're joking!'

'About him? Never. You should know me better than that.

And you used to feel the same; you know you did. Remember how you cried, back in '15 when he came back from Elba and your father wouldn't throw his bonnet over the windmill, like mine, and join his new army?'

'Yes,' doubtfully, 'but that was three years ago.'

'Precisely. Three years in which the Bourbons have proved themselves the tyrants they are. Three years in which France has learned to long for her great man back. It is but to get him there, and the country will be at his feet. And that,' proudly, 'that I am going to do.'

'You? Are you run mad, Jo? St. Helena's Lord knows how many thousand miles away, down in the South Atlantic! You might as well talk of getting the man down from the moon. And Napoleon's guarded, too. I read about it somewhere.'

'Of course he is!' Impatiently. 'That's why it will all take time: why I need your help. It's not just to get the boat; that will be easy when the time comes. Perhaps you don't quite understand that I'm a rich woman now, love. Hyde — Mr. Purchis — wished it so. He said it would be better that I have my own. He's a desperate progressive; you and he will deal together admirably.'

'A progressive! And planning to free Napoleon? Now I know you've run mad.' She stopped, puzzled, as her cousin burst into a peal of laughter.

'Hyde!' She spoke through a fresh burst of laughter that struck Juliet as oddly nervous. 'It's you who are crazy, pet. You don't think he knows anything of this project of mine, do you? That's why I need you so! That's the cream of the jest.' She stopped, eyeing her cousin cautiously as she took in the full enormity of the suggestion.

'Josephine!' The first reaction was as inevitable as it was expected. 'You don't mean to suggest that I take your place with your husband? That he's not to know?'

'But of course, love; what else? It will be a perfect Restoration Comedy for you: The Husband Deceived, The

Substitute Bride, what you will.' And then, anticipating a further outburst from her cousin. 'And before you get on your high prudish horse with me, I had better tell you that ours has been more of a farce than a marriage from the start. Hyde Purchis doesn't need a wife, he needs a talking dictionary!'

'You mean — '

'Separate bedrooms, pet; separate everything.' She coloured and Juliet felt a dangerous twinge of sympathy. 'Oh, not quite from the first,' Josephine went on. 'I'm not so unattractive as that, thank God. For a while, I think, he had it in mind to get an heir for Winchelsea. But I doubt his heart wasn't in it from the first.'

'And yours, Jo?'

'Mine? Who cares about a woman's heart! But I'm telling this all wrong. You must try to understand how things are between us. He married me, you see, to save me, to give me the protection of his name. I was in hiding, penniless; what else could I do? You don't know what it was like in Paris after Waterloo. The Prussians were bad enough, but the Russians! Barbarians. Hyde saved me — ' She stopped. 'I don't want to talk about it.'

'Of course not, dear. But, Josephine, if he has done all this for you, how can you repay him by using his money for a cause he must detest?'

'It's not his money.' Angrily. 'It's mine. He told me so. To do what I like with. And this is what I like. Oh, of course, to begin with, I tried, carefully, to see if I could win him round to the cause. Speaking in a general way, you know, so as not to make him suspect. It would have been beyond anything to have had him as our leader! The Purchises are one of the first families here, you must know. One ancestor came over with Oglethorpe on the *Anne*, and two or three, on the distaff side, on the *Mayflower*. A Purchis signed the Declaration of Independence, and his cousin died serving Cornwallis at Yorktown. Hyde could be anything he wanted, and all he does is sit out there at

Winchelsea and dream of universities and new machines. He says politics are no occupation for a gentleman! But they send for him to Savannah whenever they have trouble there, just the same.'

'And does he go?'

'Of course. It's his duty, isn't it? He always does his duty. Purchises do. Dear God I'm so tired of the Purchises! Don't you see, I need to get away somehow, Ju, or I'll go mad. There's an old aunt, out at Winchelsea. She must be a hundred if she's a day. She remembers everything! Oglethorpe kissed her in her cradle. Tomochichi made her an honorary Yamacraw — They're an Indian tribe, you know, or were . . . She'll tell you all about it. Over and over and over again.'

'No, she won't, love, because I'll not be there.'

'Juliet, you must!'

'Josephine, I'm sorry; I can't. You should have known I couldn't!'

'Nothing of the kind. Do you remember what your mother used to say, when you lost your temper? "Think rationally, Juliette; you are not a beast"?'

'Of course I remember.'

'Well, then, listen to this. On St. Helena, Napoleon is ill, dying of despair, they say, and I believe them. And in France, men are in prison for thinking rationally. The rest of Europe has been put back, like a child's game of bricks, to where it was before Napoleon blew across it with his wind of change. Think of Germany, think of Italy, united by him for the first time in human memory, with new laws, education, chances of prosperity, after all the years of petty tyranny. And, now, what has that Congress done, that danced so hard at Vienna? I tell you, they have brought back all the little tyrants, all like Louis, worse for their exile, bitter, frightened men who will make life such a hell for their subjects as to bring on years of blood sooner or later. Would it not be better to have Napoleon back? And, you loved him, remember? He was your godfather, as Josephine

was my godmother. Can you shrug your shoulders and leave him to eat out his heart in exile?'

'He's really ill?'

'Yes; that I know. Look! I brought this, just in case you were obstinate. You see, I have not wasted my time, here among the Goths, in Georgia. You know the hand?'

'His?' She glanced swiftly over the short letter, then up at her cousin with the first sign of wavering. 'It's so bad? But what would he do, Josephine?'

'Back in Europe? Not what the Bourbons have; surely you know him well enough to see that? He's a man, one that can learn from experience. You know as well as I do that all he wanted, when he came back from Elba, was peace, time to put France on her feet again. It was the British who insisted on hunting him down.'

'It's true.'

She was visibly wavering now, and Josephine pressed home her advantage. 'Of course,' she said, 'you know, whatever you decide, I'll never let you suffer, Ju. What I have, is yours, either way. Only — ' She was on her feet now, pacing the little room as if it was a cage. 'My heart is in this! If I could only do it, then I think I could pick up the ruins of my life, and make something of them. Help me, Ju?'

'It's as bad as that?'

'It's worse. I can't bear *myself*, don't you see? So how can I bear with Hyde, or his old aunt, or those good people of Savannah? I warn you, Ju, if you don't help me; if I don't get this chance to live; I may do anything; shame us all; break Hyde's heart — If he has a heart, which I doubt — But he has pride — Oh my God, he has that!' She stopped for a moment in her frantic pacing and looked down at her cousin, whose hands were working in her lap. 'Forgive me, pet. It's a great deal to ask, I know, and you need time to think about it. Well, I'm going to give it to you. I shall leave you now and go back to Winchelsea to fetch Anne. She will tell you, better than I can,

how it has been with me. We'll bring food, of course. Everything you need. Sleep on it, then. I'll come back in the morning. If you find you can't do this for me, never mind. I'll take you to Savannah for a right royal welcome from Hyde, and what happens to me afterwards, is no one's business but mine. And his, poor man. But, Ju,' she took her cousin's hand, 'if you think it over, and find you can . . . For his sake . . . Do you remember sitting on his knee, and calling him "*mon petit oncle*"? If you do — just think of the game it will be! You'll stay here, of course, with Anne. I'll come to you daily — ' she anticipated a question. 'Hyde will never notice. He cares nothing of where I am, so long as I appear when there are guests. No! Don't say anything now. At least think it over while I'm gone . . . Tonight . . . Please?'

'Very well.' Doubtfully. 'But I beg you, don't count on anything, Jo, I don't see — '

'Hush!' Josephine swept her into a scented embrace. 'I must leave you, pet, or I'm likely to be benighted on my way back to Savannah after I've brought you Anne. Hyde doesn't like me to be out in the dark. I love it!' She smiled the wicked little smile Juliet remembered so well. 'Oil and vinegar, that's Hyde and me. Be good, pet!' They were outside now, on the desolate shore. 'Not that there's much else for you to do.'

Left alone, Juliet prowled restlessly about the disused paths of the old garden. From that first moment when she had seen Josephine's name in the tattered newspaper that held her scanty shopping, she had been so sure of her. And now, this. If she refused to do what Josephine asked, how could she accept her help? And yet, what could she do but refuse? To deceive the world, as they had done as children, might be entertaining enough: she felt a little stir of excitement at the thought. To be Mrs. Hyde Purchis, all of a sudden! To deal with the friends and relations who had, she gathered, taken her cousin in instant and understandable dislike! She was enough her father's daughter to find the prospect almost irresistible. And acting

had always been a passion with her. She lifted her tattered calico skirts delicately, as Josephine had done when she went down the bluff, the gesture the exact replica of her cousin's, '*Mon dieu,*' she had Josephine's accent to a nicety. 'But I vow I could fool the whole set of them to the top of their bent.' Impossible, of course. She picked an acid little cluster of grapes from the vine that had invaded the neglected garden and began systematically to strip them from the stem and throw them over the edge of the bluff into dark, fast waters below. To deceive the world was one thing, to deceive the husband quite another.

And Anne would agree. Here, suddenly, was a consideration to calm her tumultuous thoughts. Anne, with her splendid French bourgeois common sense would never countenance such a project for a moment. No need, then, to fret herself. Josephine would be back, quite soon now, to admit her mistake, to be comforted a little, as when she was a child, and then to take Juliet home to Savannah. But time was passing. The heat had gone from the sun and the shadow of the big magnolia lay heavy across the dusty garden. Juliet hurried into the house and began to collect her few belongings, ready to leave as soon as Josephine returned. 'He doesn't like me to be out in the dark.' Her cousin's voice echoed in her ears. 'Oil and vinegar.' Ah, poor Josephine, who had always planned to marry one of Napoleon's marshals, and live gaily ever after. And, for a moment she allowed herself the luxury of self-pity, poor Juliet. She, too, had had her plans, back in childhood at Fontainebleau, her dreams. Not at all like Josephine's, for the two of them had always been as different in character as they were alike in appearance. Having watched her mother silently suffer from her father's rambling, gambling style of living her own hopes had all been for security, for peace and quietness. 'And look at me now!' Angrily, she turned her back on the big glass and pushed her other equally shabby dress into the battered old portmanteau that had been her father's. 'Dreams!' It was a bad sign to be talking to oneself. 'So much for dreams.'

CHAPTER TWO

It would be dark soon. Juliet lit the lamp, noticing that it had oil for only one more night. Josephine's rowers might need the light to guide them to the decaying wharf below the bluff. Stupid! She had never thought of them. They were bound, surely, to tell the master who had freed them about today's odd excursion. That would settle everything. No need for her to refuse Josephine, she need merely point out the unpracticality of the whole scheme.

But she would be glad to see them coming. Whippoorwills cried and fire-flies flickered here and there on the bluff as she strained eyes and ears for evidence of the boat's return. It was a week now since they had buried her father in the forlorn graveyard behind the house, a week of nights alone here in the wilderness. She had managed, almost, to convince herself that she was not afraid, and had known, doing so, that only a fool would not feel some fear so circumstanced. Anything could happen: a runaway slave, a rattlesnake bite or just a mere commonplace illness. As she had trimmed the lamp, night after lonely night, and made herself concentrate on her battered volume of Shakespeare's plays, she had been aware, all the time, of death, looking quietly in at the window.

Dreams? Nightmares. And over now, please God. For, at last, she heard, somewhere down where the backwater joined the main river, the sound of singing. Josephine's rowers, keeping their hearts up against the gathering dusk? She must hope so.

The tune was vaguely familiar. Now she began to distinguish words, sung in the thick negro dialect she found so difficult to understand:

'Jenny shake her toe at me
Jenny gone away.'

They repeated it with emphasis, coming nearer all the time, and then:

'Hurray, Miss Susie, oh,
Jenny gone away.'

The boat swept into sight, lanterns hanging at bow and stern, and Juliet let out a long sigh of relief. Had she really imagined that Josephine might not come back?

She ran down the path she had had to remake over the bluff and stood on the rickety little pier to watch the boat in. She ought to have a lantern to guide them, but there was no such thing in the house. Luckily, it was not quite dark yet, and the boat nosed its way in easily enough.

'Getting impatient, pet?' Josephine jumped lightly on to the wharf, skirts gathered in one hand. 'I can tell you, so was Anne!' She turned back to help a solidly-built figure climb laboriously ashore.

'I should just about think so!' Anne's English had improved beyond recognition since Juliet had last seen her. But now, suddenly, she burst into a flood of angry French. '*Nom d'un nom d'un nom, le pacquet!*' and then, still in French. 'I forget myself; the poor creatures do not understand,' and, slowly, in English, 'Careful with the box, there. Keep it the right way up!' She turned to envelop Juliet in an immense bear's hug of an embrace that smelt hauntingly of garlic. '*Ma petite! Dieu* but it's good to see you.'

Returning the embrace as warmly, Juliet nevertheless spared an anxious glance for the men who had moored the boat and were now busily passing bundle after bundle ashore. Could she have been wrong in all her comforting calculations? It looked as if Anne actually intended to stay.

'Come up to the house, pet.' Josephine was very much in

charge. 'You'd best tell them where to stow all this stuff. I'm sorry we were so long. I'd not thought how much you'd need. But Anne did, of course.'

'You mean . . . You still mean? I'm to stay?'

'You thought I'd have changed my mind?' They were walking up the path, now, Anne a little behind them, keeping an anxious eye on the men who were carrying her precious box.

'Well — yes. Anne will never agree, for one thing. And, besides, what about the men?'

'The boys? Good God, they'd never tell on me! They know how their corn's buttered! And as for Anne, just ask her! But not yet.' She pulled Juliet a little away from the house. 'Don't worry about the things. Anne will cope; she always does. And loves it. She's busy now, but once she gets loose on you, I won't have a chance. So, quickly, pet: I've news for you, bad news. There's a warrant out. For your arrest, and your father's. In Savannah.'

'A warrant?'

'For debt. Poor Uncle Charles seems to have borrowed from the wrong people in New Orleans. And in Charleston. And, I'm afraid, in Savannah too, a little.'

'Oh, my God.' He had told her, gaily, that he had a little something saved. That they could pay their way in Savannah. She should have known better than to believe him.

'Yes. And the worst of it is, he used your name as well as his own. Told a doleful tale — as well he might — of his daughters out here, with not even the bare necessities of life. Of course they believed him. Besides, they're kind, the Savannah merchants.' She seemed to admit it almost reluctantly. 'And then, a few days later, comes the news from New Orleans and Charleston. Well, you can see how they felt!' She laughed, and for an angry moment Juliet felt her quite heartless. '*Isn't* it a fortunate thing even our maiden names were different! Nobody, for a moment, connects you with me. But you do see, pet, that it narrows your field of choice?' She turned to lead the way back

to the house. 'We're not going to talk about it any more tonight. For one thing, I must be off the moment the men have finished unloading. For another, I want you to hear what Anne has to say.'

'You mean, she's for it?'

Josephine laughed. 'You were counting on her, weren't you, pet? Well, I won't pretend she didn't make me a great scene at first — all in French, luckily, so no one understood but me. The *convenances*, your good name, Hyde's bad temper ... oh, a terrible deal of rubbish she talked, until I showed her his letter.'

'Napoleon's?'

'Of course. Had you forgotten how she adores him? Compared with his, your life and mine are trifles in her sight. Well, she's right, isn't she? There, love, they've finished.' A quick, warm, pleading kiss. 'Sleep well, and dream of him, down there on St. Helena, eating his heart out. Oh — ' she turned back, 'and don't fret yourself about the debtor's warrant, pet. If you decide you can't do it, that will be the least of our troubles. Hyde will see to it all for you. It will but be for you to stay here until he's paid off your creditors. I don't suppose they'd move against you anyway, once they knew you were my cousin.'

'Oh, Jo!' This unexpected kindness brought the first tears to Juliet's eyes.

'Oh, Ju! You didn't really think I'd let you languish in a debtors' prison, did you? Remember, whatever you decide, you're safe now. It's I who am not.' She turned and followed the man called Satan, who had been waiting to light her down the bluff.

'What does she mean?' Juliet asked Anne who had emerged from the house to see her mistress off.

'Nothing good. She's in a bad state, I'm afraid, my poor Josephine.' She lapsed comfortably into French. 'But we'll talk of all that later, over supper, when we've got this pigsty of yours into some kind of order.'

Between them, she and Josephine seemed to have thought of everything. Curtains for the windows, cool linen sheets for the shabby bedsteads, oil for the lamp, and, best of all, food and wine. The battered old stove that had driven Juliet almost to distraction lit like an angel for Anne, who was soon cracking eggs into the skillet she had brought. 'You make the salad,' she instructed Juliet, in English now. 'And *mon dieu* where did I put the *tire-bouchon*?'

'It's here.' Juliet picked up the corkscrew. 'But, Anne, wine?'

'To drink his health,' said Anne uncompromisingly. 'And yours.'

Juliet almost admitted defeat, then and there. Later, gazing across the table at Anne, she asked the question that seemed basic to the whole exraordinary affair. 'What's the matter with my cousin, Anne?'

'Nothing.' Anne shrugged. 'Everything. To give you an honest answer, I don't know. But whatever it is, it's bad. She left Fontainebleau, you know, left home, soon after Napoleon escaped from Elba and you and your parents left. She went without a word, without a line. Poor madame, I think it helped to kill her. To lose everyone at once, like that. Those were bad times.' She poured more wine for them both. 'Best forgotten. But you need to know . . . to understand. We thought she was with Napoleon, perhaps. As a gesture — *tu comprends*? Because his wife would not come to him, that Austrian bitch who fawned on him while he was happy and failed him when he needed her.'

'Dear God!' Juliet's thoughts were of Josephine. 'But he's — '

'Old enough to be her father? What has that to do with anything. And, mind you, this is all conjecture, your aunt's and mine. We had nothing else to do, then, but imagine things. And wait. When she came back, after Waterloo, she told us nothing. She looked like death. It finished her mother. She hardly

noticed; Josephine, I mean. She was mad, a little, I think, for a while then, *cette pauvre Josephine*. We were in Paris by then, you understand. Fontainebleau was not safe, with the enemy armies on the rampage. God knows, Paris was dangerous enough. And Josephine would go out, on purpose, to insult them, to throw things . . . After her mother died . . . What could I do? I had no authority. She laughed at me; a laugh like death. And then, God bless him. Mr. Purchis brought her back. I don't know where he had found her; she never speaks of it, and nor does he. A good man that, Juliette; a saint almost. When she told me they were to marry I was almost mad with joy. And now — '

'Yes, now.' Juliet seized on it. 'If he's such a good man, this Mr. Purchis, how can you possibly suggest that I be a party to deceiving him?'

'Because it's the only hope,' said Anne sombrely. 'You don't understand, *ma petite*, and nor, come to that, does he. Well, he may be a saint, but he's a man, too, with a man's blindness. Oh, I thought it would work, at first. Hoped it would.' She sighed. 'Hopeless. And her fault, mind you. He tried, oh, *mon dieu*, how I have watched him try. It was Paris of the occupation, you understand. Not easy. But he did everything to make it so.'

'And she?'

'Hated it all. And made no effort to hide it. I think it was despair, mainly, that decided him to come back here this spring. And she was eager to come. I don't know . . . I think, perhaps, already, this idea of rescuing Napoleon was growing in her. Of course, I knew nothing of that; not then. She has always been one to keep her own counsel, your cousin. But it seemed as if she was eager to come here. And then, when she arrived — '

'Well?'

'Disaster! She hates it so, poor child. Now, me, I find it a good enough sort of place. It is but to teach them a thing or two,

those poor benighted servants of theirs. Mr Purchis's learn gladly enough. Well, they love him, of course.'

'Yes.' Eagerly. 'So, surely, the men who brought you here today. They won't deceive him?'

'Lord bless you, child, of course they will. For the bribes she gives them? Besides, only Satan really saw you by daylight and he's faithful as the grave. No, don't deceive yourself, Juliette, this is a decision you have to make. I can't help you. Not really. But I can tell you I think the only hope for your cousin's marriage is for her to see Napoleon again, and see him for the old man he is.'

'Oh . . .' Now, at last, this made sense. 'Oh, Anne — '

'I know. It is not pleasant. But there are better sides to it, too. It *is* a good work to save the Emperor from that death in life on St. Helena. And it will do your cousin good to do it. And what harm, after all, can it do you?'

'And afterwards?'

'Oh, afterwards!' She finished the last of the wine. 'Let "afterwards" take care of itself. We have cares enough for today, you and I.'

Extraordinary to be tucked in, like a child, among cool sheets fragrant with a herb she did not recognise. She meant to lie awake, to think, to decide . . . She slept, dreamlessly, the sleep of complete exhaustion, and woke to hear Anne busy in the next room, and smell the tantalising smell of fresh coffee.

'You're awake!' Anne must have heard her stir. 'Stay there, and I'll bring your breakfast. You're tired out, aren't you, under that tan of yours. I shall tell madame you're in no state to decide anything — not till you've got rid of those dark circles from under your eyes. You cry too easily, too.' She brought the pillow from her own bed and plumped it up behind Juliet. 'It's more than madame does, but I've heard her in the night, just lately. There!' The tray held a great mug of coffee, with freshly heated rolls to be dipped in it. 'We'll have you a bit more yourself before madame gets here, but I tell you, now whatever

you decide, you'll have to stay here a few days to get your strength back. I'd not risk you on the water as you are for anything, and so I shall tell madame. There are far too many fevers to be caught, here among the swamps.'

'Nonsense.' But it failed to sound convincing, and Juliet was glad enough to finish rolls and coffee, then drift back into a half-sleep that was full, now, of an extraordinary mixture of dream and memory. Sometimes she was nursing her father through his last illness, sometimes packing up, at frantic speed, to leave New Orleans, or, perhaps worst of all, trying to fend off the pushing curiosity of the women in the ladies' cabin of the steamboat that had brought them up to Charleston.

It was all over now. All ended . . . and she was alone, with her decision to make. She burrowed her face more deeply into the pillow, and slept. 'I won't wake her!' Anne's voice, saying this, did in fact wake her, and she sat up in bed to see afternoon sunshine flooding in through the window she had cleared of leaves.

'I am awake!' Her voice was still heavy with sleep.

'That's my girl!' Josephine was more elegant than ever in a tailored riding-habit of dark green. 'Hyde thinks I'm over here riding,' she explained. 'He keeps horses for me at Screven's Ferry. Thank you, Anne.' It was dismissal as well as thanks. And then, as the door closed with a little, disapproving click, 'She thinks you're not well.'

'I'm a little tired.'

'And no wonder. So the best thing you can do is stay here for a while. And if you want to amuse yourself by listening to Anne and me talk about Savannah society, so much the better. We can't lose, can we, pet?'

* * *

So it was that without ever actually admitting to herself that she had decided to cooperate in this strange charade, Juliet

found herself, day afer day, submissively listening as Josephine and Anne took it in turns to tell her about the plantation at Winchelsea and the town house the young architect William Jay had just finished for Hyde Purchis in one of Savannah's squares.

'That's the one you'll really need to know about,' Josephine explained a week or so later when Anne had finally consented to let her patient get up and sit with her cousin under the shade of the big magnolia. 'Getting away from Winchelsea is not so bad; Hyde's busy on the plantation; we don't have many guests; I can usually manage that. It's when we're at Savannah I shall really need you. Do you know — ' There was a new note in her voice today, a note of gaiety that took Juliet back to happier days. 'I've enlisted my first troops!'

'What?'

'I thought that would surprise you! Well, to deal fairly with you, it did me a little.' She looked down for a moment, playing with the ribbons of the big straw hat she carried. 'I'd let it be known, you see, in the most careful possible way, that I would be glad to hear from French exiles up and down the coast.'

'Yes?' Had Josephine stopped out of nervousness, or to whet her curiosity?

'So — yesterday, when I was riding down the drive at Winchelsea, a man suddenly appeared from the direction of the sea. A Frenchman. He pretended to be a beggar at first, but as soon as he was sure of me, he told me who he was. One of Napoleon's Old Guard, Ju! And there are more of them. Down on an island below Tybee somewhere, just waiting for a chance: their chance, our chance . . . When I told him I had money to buy a boat, he cried . . . Imagine, one of the Old Guard crying like a child! He says he can collect enough men for a rescue party, if I can but provide the ship!'

'Yes?' Juliet was afraid she could see where this was leading.

'Yes. Of course I can't hire one round here. That really

would be unfair to poor Hyde. Just suppose the attempt failed — I won't believe it, but one must think of everything — in that case, there must be nothing to connect him with it. I shall have to go up to Norfolk, I think, and hire one of the Baltimore Clippers everyone speaks of so highly. All the best pirates use them, I understand. So if anything should go wrong, it will be easy to wash one's hands of the whole affair. Specially if I'm known to have been safe at home in Savannah the whole time.'

'But, Jo — '

'Too late for buts now, pet. I've given my word. My God, if you could have seen his face when he realised I meant it. And as for you, no need to pull such a long one. There's oceans of time, still, before we need do anything. He's only got the nucleus of a force, my Captain Froche — Not his real name I have no doubt. But what matters that?'

'And he knows yours?'

'Inevitable, I'm afraid. But don't you see — ' If her heart leapt up at this sign of her cousin's cooperation, she took care to conceal it. 'That's where the strength of my position lies. What's the use of anyone trying to involve me, when I've you to protect me?'

It was Rubicon, and crossed so quietly that Juliet hardly noticed. Only, from the other side, she asked, 'When will you go?'

'Oh, not for ages yet. I've a friend in Norfolk: I've written him to keep his eyes open for me. No need to go until he has something for me to look at. There's no rush, after all. We can't possibly act until spring. But at least, now, he will have hope for company, down there on St Helena.'

'You've written?'

'Yes. By a safe hand: I hope! It will go by a roundabout enough route, I fear, but he should have it before Christmas. And now, to your lesson, Ju. Our house is called the Purchis House, and it stands in — '

'Oglethorpe Square,' said Juliet obediently. 'On the Bay side, just round the corner from the house Mr. Jay built for his sister's brother-in-law Mr. Richardson. His wife and I do not get on very well, but bow when we meet in the square.'

Josephine laughed. 'You could say that of any of the good ladies of Savannah, pet. That's the strength of our position. I've made no friends, and don't intend to. Now, take me into the house and upstairs to your bedroom, and don't forget which servants you'll meet on the way. No, stop! Much better to begin from the wharf. After all, it stands to reason you'll come by water. Which wharf, Ju?'

'The third from the end, down towards Fort Wayne. The carriages will be waiting — it seems lunatic to get out the horses for that tiny distance, Jo? It can't be half a mile.'

'You won't say that when you've walked a hundred yards over the sandhills they call streets in Savannah. Oh, they've made some effort at paving the squares, but the streets are pure Sahara. So, you greet Jem the coachman, and drive up over the bluff — ' she paused expectantly.

'And across the Bay, which is a street, of all things, and Broughton Street, bowing to anyone who seems to recognise me, down Abercorn Street, and you can't mistake the house.' Her accent now, was so exact an imitation of her cousin's that Anne, joining them, was not sure whether tutor or pupil was speaking. She sat down and began meticulously darning a sheet, occasionally interjecting a correction when her mistress struck her as drawing too long a bow. '*Non, madame*, Mr. Updyke, Mr. Purchis's agent is not ugly as sin, he is merely not very well-bred, with a habit of striped waistcoats, and — ugh — ' she made an expressive face — 'you must watch out for your skirts, Juliette!'

'Spits, does he?' Juliet had grown used to this deplorable American habit in New Orleans. 'Well, thank goodness Mr. Purchis sees him always in his study.'

'"Hyde", pet, if you love me, remember to call him "Hyde"!'

Juliet looked at her sombrely. 'I think I must love you, Jo, to have embarked on this madness.'

* * *

Chill November wind ruffled the water. The boatman were singing their strange song, over and over again:

'Jenny shake her toe at me
Jenny gone away . . .'

Juliet shivered. Where was Josephine by now? There had only been time for a few quick, last moment instructions before the hired carriage had arrived from Charleston to take her cousin back there. Had Josephine planned it that way? So that there would, simply, be no time for second thoughts?

'You're cold, madame?' Anne's voice was at once a comfort and a warning. Josephine had managed to get the men who had brought their picnic ashore, that first day, moved to field work. Of this group, only Satan, who was giving time to the rowers, had ever seen the two cousins together by daylight; Josephine had taken good care of that. So far as the others were concerned, they had merely brought this mistress up from Winchelsea, dropped her for a moment near Ruffton and were now taking her home to Savannah.

'You can see the lights now, upstream at Screven's Ferry.' Anne provided this useful piece of information casually, as she draped a shawl round Juliet's shoulders. No: round Josephine's! She must think of herself all the time, while the charade lasted, as Josephine, as Mrs. Hyde Purchis. Now it was an internal shudder that ran through her. In an hour or so she would doubtless be meeting her 'husband'. She had been mad . . . mad . . . mad.

'Hurray, Miss Susie oh,
Jenny gone away!'

The lights of Savannah were very near now, high upon the bluff. Easier to arrive in dusk like this. Doubtless Josephine had planned that too. But was there anything easy about this folly in which she had involved herself?

'Anne, I don't feel well.' She remembered to make her voice a languid imitation of Josephine's. 'I think I shall go to bed the minute I get home.'

'Mr. Purchis will be disappointed, madame. When he gets back from the Club.' Anne let disapproval show. 'He so looks forward to your return from Winchelsea. And besides, there will be a million things to discuss about this party for the opening of the new theatre next week. You know how highly Mr. Purchis thinks of Mr. Jay. He will want everything of the very best!'

* * *

For once, back there, Josephine had seemed distracted. 'It would happen now! We've this party, next week, for Mr. Jay who built our house. It's the opening of the new theatre he's built. It's only round a couple of corners from us. Everyone's coming. Well, of course they are! When Purchis of Winchelsea gives a party, everyone does come. And now ... now ... now—' She had prowled about the chilly bluff like a tigress—'My friend in Norfolk writes that he has the very clipper for me. If I can snap her up fast enough. There are plenty of uses for a ship like her. Ju, you'll have to!'

'Jo! A party? I can't!' But here she was, sitting in the surprisingly comfortable boat, wearing Josephine's clothes, which fitted her exactly now. 'You've lost weight, and no wonder,' Anne had remarked, buttoning her up. 'And her colour, to a tee.' Grumbling, recalcitrant, Juliet had kept, all autumn, out

of the sunshine she loved. Now her hands and face were as lady-white as anyone could wish. She looked down at her hands, with dislike, and was aware that Anne was watching her anxiously.

'Oh, pshaw!' It was Josephine's tone exactly. 'I had clean forgot Mr. Jay and his party. Very well, Anne, I shall not go to bed, but I shall not be at home to anyone.'

'Very good, madame.' If Anne heaved a sigh of relief, she did so silently.

Yamacraw bluff loomed dark above them. The third wharf up from Fort Wayne. She let Satan help her ashore . . . The carriage waiting . . . 'How are you, Jem?' Suppose it was not Jem? Suppose he was ill and one of the other servants had come for her? Stupid: Anne would have contrived to warn her.

'Purely, ma'am.' Jem's accent was thicker than Satan's; Josephine had said she often found it hard to understand him.

Juliet stepped languidly into the little carriage, then turned back for a moment to the men, busy tying up the boat. 'Thank you, Satan. Thank you all.' Something in Anne's disapproving air as she followed her into the carriage told her that this had been out of character, but she refused to care. And, after all, Satan at least deserved to be thanked. He was deceiving a good master for her sake, or, rather for Josephine, and money.

Up the bluff . . . across the Bay, which looked very much like any other street, except that the river-side was open on to the wide stretch of bluff, planted here and there with trees, unrecognisable in the fast-fading light. She had forgotten the name of the street they were on now. Panic seized her. But what did it matter? They were crossing another wide one. Broughton Street, of course. 'Not many people about on Broughton,' she said. For her own benefit? Anne's? Jem's?

The house in Oglethorpe Square was larger than she had expected. Flares burned, welcomingly, at either side of the double steps with the handsome ironwork that one of William

Jay's friends had provided. His name eluded her and again panic threatened, to be fought off, again, with common sense. What on earth did it matter?

The carriage had been expected. At the top of the steps, double doors were thrown open revealing a brilliantly lighted interior. Jem helped her down. She took one quick, breathless look around the darkening square: trees of some kind, lights across the way — of course, Mrs. Richardson's house. 'Thank you, Jem.' She lifted delicate muslin skirts and climbed the steps as if she had done it every day for months.

Servants were drawn up on either side of the broad entrance hall, white teeth enthusiastically agleam in black faces. She must remember that she, Josephine, had been down at Winchelsea for two weeks. 'No help for it,' Josephine had said, 'they're all bound to be there to greet you. You will just have to make the best you can of it. Remember as many names as possible — ' Remember? She could remember nothing, an actress who had walked on to the wrong scene of an unknown play. She stood there for an endless moment, gazing past the welcoming row of faces to the stairway that curved up on each side of the far end of the hall to an elegant, balustraded gallery. Once there, she would be safe. Hyde would be out, Josephine had told her: 'It's his night for the Club. He never misses when he's in Savannah.' So — up those stairs, down the hall, up another flight, and sanctuary: her own rooms. But first she must run this friendly gauntlet. She took a deep breath and turned to the huge woman who stood to the right of the door, her richly coloured tuban proclaiming her status as housekeeper. 'Venus!' She said. 'I'm glad to see you. How are the children?'

'They's rumbustious, thanking you, missus. I never saw such a pack of blessed devils in my life! Well, what d'you expect, with Satan for a father?'

It was an old, reliable joke, which had irritated Josephine almost, she said, past bearing. Juliet found it oddly touching.

'I'm glad. She turned to the butler, who was standing on the other side of the door, resplendent in formal black and a brilliant scarlet neck-handkerchief. 'And you, Moses?'

'All the better for seeing you home, ma'am. We've missed you sorely all those long days you've been at Winchelsea. Home don't seem home without the mistress.'

'Thank you.' It was more, she rather suspected, than Josephine deserved. Her heart sank as she looked down the line of smiling men on one side and women on the other. It was impossible. It had to be done. A girl's face, close to Venus, swam out of the mist that was blurring her eyes. Lighter than the others, beautiful, with huge dark eyes. 'She fancies herself a beauty,' Josephine had said. Juliet took a deep breath. 'Alice, I'm exhausted. Take me up!' A wan smile for the rest of them. 'Thank you all. Tomorrow . . .'

It was over, they were dispersing with sympathetic murmurs, while Alice (thank God it *was* Alice) had come swiftly forward to relieve her of bonnet and gloves. 'I could see from the first you were tired, madam.' Her English was as beautiful as her face. 'It's a long pull back from Winchelsea, even in this weather. Mr. Purchis *will* be sorry to see you so tuckered out.' Was there a warning in her voice and in the glance that she directed upwards to the balustraded gallery at the end of the hall? Following it, 'Oh,' said Juliet.

Had he been there all the time? She would never be sure. Now he advanced into the light of the central chandelier and leaned his elbows on the marble balustrade to look down at her. Their eyes met: his cool, grey; hers suddenly aswim with tears. Josephine had told her nothing. What had she said? 'Everyone adores him.' Adore. Ridiculous word. Handsome? Well, of course. Soft brown hair brushed carelessly back from the high forehead. 'He won't wear side-whiskers.' Josephine's voice, a mocking echo. 'He should have married a talking dictionary.' Why had Josephine never *told* her? This was not an American as she had learned to know them in the gambling hells of New

Orleans. This, she gave a little gulp, as if she found breathing difficult, this —

She paused, even thought suspended, as he spoke. 'Welcome home, my love. I'm sorry to hear the journey has fatigued you. I had hoped you would be able to give Mr. Jay the meeting. He sups with me tonight, to talk plans for next week.' He started elegant, leisurely, down the curving stair towards her.

'Oh!' said Juliet again, and then, gathering her wits about her. 'La, my dear, what a delightful surprise. I had quite thought you would be at the Club tonight.'

'And so I would, but for your happy return.' He was advancing on her, now, across the polished wood floor of the hall and she found her frantic thoughts fix themselves on the vast width of the planks. At last, reluctant, terrified (but why?) she raised her dark eyes to meet his grey ones. 'Welcome, my dear.' You could hardly call it a kiss, that butterfly touch of his, yet it left her shaken as by an earthquake.

'Madame is worn out.' Anne bustled forward to interrupt a silence that seemed as if it would last forever. 'Let us but get her upstairs, sir, Alice and I, and an hour's rest will have her right as a trivet for Mr. Jay.'

'A trivet?' There was laughter in the deep voice now. 'My dear Anne,' he lapsed into unexpectedly fluent French, 'where in the world have you been studying English?'

'Get along with you, sir.' Anne spoke with the comfortable licence of an invaluable servant and companion. 'My English is no worse than your French, I'll be bound. And what time do you expect Mr. Jay, if I may ask? We hardly expected company, the night we got home, the mistress and I.'

'And no more did I.' To Juliet's shaken relief, he had moved a little away from her, but still kept those penetrating grey eyes fixed on her face. 'To tell truth, Anne, I met Mr. Jay at the Exchange this morning, and he invited himself. There's no time to be lost, he says, if the plans for his grand opening party are

not all to go awry. So — if you can bring yourself to join us — presently — my dear, it will make him a happy man as well as me.'

'Yes, yes of course. An hour, half an hour, I don't know.' She was babbling, and could not help it. It was Alice, now, who came to the rescue with a strong young arm around her waist. 'The mistress is tired out, sir.'

'I'm sorry.' It was formal now. 'But let me help you up the stairs.'

'No!' If he touched her again, anything might happen. 'No, thank you.' With an effort she had the light note again. 'Anne and Alice are quite assistance enough for one able bodied young woman. Give my apologies to Mr. Jay, when he arrives, and tell him I will join you as soon as I have recovered from my journey.' She managed a laugh. 'That great journey from Winchelsea! But it's true, somehow, today it has been more tiring than usual.'

'You left all well there, I hope.'

'Oh, yes.' Now she was back within her brief. 'Mr. Updyke asked me to tell you that the cotton's all in, and the best crop for years.'

'Good. And old Naomi?'

Naomi. Naomi? NAOMI? She felt Anne stir restlessly behind her, then take the plunge to save her. 'I visited her this morning, sir. She's as well as you can expect, at a hundred odd. She was asking for news of Satan and the others. Come, love.' Her arm was firm under Juliet's. 'You must rest.' And then, back over her shoulder to Hyde, as the three of them started to climb the shelving stairway. 'You know how tiring it is leaving Winchelsea.'

'Yes indeed. I hope you told them we'd be there for Christmas, my love.'

Christmas? She and Josephine had never discussed it. 'A whole month off?' Her tone was more brittle than she liked. 'La, my dear, you don't expect me to plan that far, do you?'

Please God, by Christmas Josephine would be back, this impossible charade over, and for good.

CHAPTER THREE

Josephine's room was furnished luxuriously in imported chintz, and Juliet, settling on to a *chaise longue* with a sigh of relief only wished she could stay there all evening. But Anne was abandoning her. 'If you'll excuse me, madame, I must set about my unpacking.' Obviously this was routine, and not to be departed from, but it was a bad moment just the same.

'Yes, of course, Anne.' Two of the menservants had already brought up a couple of huge imperials that contained the necessities Josephine took with her between Winchelsea and Savannah, and Alice was hard at work unpacking them, with many a *sotto voce* mutter at the state of silks and muslins.

Normally, Juliet remembered, Alice would have accompanied her mistress to Winchelsea. Josephine had left her behind this time to make the switch of identities easier. 'I missed you, Alice.' She smiled at the girl.

'I should just about say you did, from the state your things are in. That Poor Kate down at Winchelsea has about as much sense as a turkey buzzard. And her hands always dirty too.' She held up a white muslin dress marred by two great black smudges. 'Look!'

'Take them away, Alice!' Juliet had no need to make her voice sound fretful. 'Do the best you can with them. I must have half an hour's sleep or I'll be yawning in Mr. Jay's face.'

'Yes, ma'am.' A hint of surprise in Alice's tone? Why should she not yawn in William Jay's face? I'll be back in half an hour

to dress you,' the girl went on. 'The lilac, do you think?'

'Why not? And mind; no one is to disturb me; *no one*, I say, until I ring.'

'Very good, ma'am.' No wonder if Alice sounded surprised now.

Left alone, Juliet was up from the *chaise longue* in an instant. She had half an hour to learn this room by heart. Here was the long closet Josephine had described Hyde as having built specially for her. And here, unmistakable, the lilac dress Alice had recommended. And what a mercy she had! Running her eye quickly along the formidable line of gowns, Juliet picked out a cambric day dress that would be suitable for tomorrow morning. But how would Josephine describe it? By its yellow ribbons, probably, and, yes, there on the shelf below were soft little yellow slippers to match. A crowning mercy, Josephine had said, that even their feet were the same size. Juliet's hands, however, were half a size larger than her cousin's as she had discovered, with some discomfort, that afternoon.

Her eye lit on the dark green riding-habit Josephine had once worn to visit her, where it hung with three or four others at the far end of the cupboard. Perhaps she wore riding clothes in the morning? Josephine had told her she often went for what she called 'a blow' before breakfast. But tomorrow she would be tired and order breakfast in bed. So, no riding-habit. She dismissed that problem from her thoughts and turned to examine the flounced dressing-table.

Jewels! Here was something Josephine had forgotten to tell her about. Alice had unpacked a leather case and put it on the dressing-table, but where in the world was the key? A similar box, in the drawer, was also locked. With shaking hands, she opened the absurd little reticule Josephine had given her. Money, smelling salts, a comb, a lace-trimmed handkerchief, a tiny silver stick containing delicately tinted lip-salve . . . No keys. The pocket of the dress Alice had helped her out of? But

it was gone. Alice had carried it off, with the rest of the pile, to be washed and pressed. But, surely, she must know her mistress's habits and would have retrieved the key first?

This began to look like disaster. And then, an odd little memory: Josephine rather reluctantly taking off the tiny gold watch she wore pinned to her dress, and saying, 'I mustn't forget — ' And at that moment Anne had come bustling into the room with some last minute problem to do with closing the house on the bluff, and they had never come back to the thing Josephine must not forget. And, face it, where else would one carry the kind of delicate little key that might well open both these jewel boxes but on a chain round one's neck? She half thought, now, that she could remember Josephine, from time to time, putting a hand to the bodice of her gown; the gesture of someone making sure a precious object is still there?

Oddly enough, Juliet found this first real set-back bracing. There was nothing she could do about it for the moment, and her self-appointed half-hour was almost up. She finished her tour of the room as swiftly as possible. Ranges of drawers, full of scented gloves, all too small, delicate underwear, obviously Paris-made, dozens of lace-trimmed handkerchiefs like the one in her reticule . . . What an orgy Hyde Purchis must have had, outfitting his bride. 'You should have seen me when he found me,' Josephine had said. Of course, that was three years ago many of these luxurious trifles must have been bought since, with the money he had made over to her. And there was another thing. Idiot that she was, she had forgotten to ask Josephine about money! The reticule contained only a few dollars. When that was exhausted, how did she set about obtaining more? Had she a bank account somewhere? Oh well, she crossed the room and pulled the bell-rope firmly, she must just hope Anne knew.

Alice was with her so swiftly that she must have been hovering outside. Her first words confirmed this. 'The trouble I've had to keep them away from you, ma'am! And there's Miss

Anne fit to be tied.' She sounded pleased about it. Jealousy here, and might it be useful?

'Oh, Anne!' Idiotic to have exiled her one ally. 'Yes, I will see her for a moment, before I change.'

'Yes, ma'am.' Disapprovingly. 'Mr. Jay's been here this ten minutes and more.' She seemed to expect this to have some effect.

'Has he? Oh well, he and M—' she had almost said Mr. Purchis—'my husband will have plenty to talk about. Call Anne for me would you, Alice? It's absurd,' she plunged into it, 'but I seem to have mislaid the keys to my jewel boxes.'

'Your key!' Singular not plural; she must just hope the girl had not noticed. Her reaction was certainly dramatic enough. 'You've never lost your chain, ma'am? And the locket? Could you have left it at Winchelsea, do you think? Yes, of course I'll call Miss Anne this instant, though I doubt she won't know a thing about it.' And then, with sudden, disconcerting, warm sympathy, 'Oh, ma'am, I *am* sorry.'

A locket! Alice had closed the door softly behind her. On the same chain as the key. With a picture? Lockets, after all, usually had pictures. And Josephine had 'forgotten' to give it to her. So—a picture of Napoleon? Too much, surely, to hope it was of Hyde Purchis, particularly in the light of that odd sympathy of Alice's.

But here was Anne, very much on her dignity. Really, or faking it? Was there no end to these deceptions? And, of course, angrily answering herself, there was not, nor would be, till Josephine came back. 'You've lost your chain, ma'am?' Anne's voice was formal. 'Now that *is* a how-de-do! What in the world will Mr. Purchis say if you appear with no jewels! And where on earth can you have left it? Not at Winchelsea, that I do know, for I remember you locking the jewel box and tucking the chain back into your dress.' Here was useful information. Thank God, Anne was no fool. 'I'll be bound it was when we stopped below Ruffton,' she went on, 'to look at that

abandoned plantation house. I told you not to walk through the brush, remember, but you would do it. It must have caught on a briar, and pulled. We'll have to send the men for it tomorrow.'

'I just hope they can find it.' Juliet sounded doubtful, as well she might. When would Josephine remember her oversight, and what in the world would she do about it? Nothing, probably. What could she?

The lilac dress cried out for jewellery. But at least its fit was perfect, its low-cut, tight bodice flatteringly good for morale after those months of drab and increasingly shabby travel-wear. She looked from her reflection in the long glass to Alice, anxiously hovering. 'A ribbon, perhaps?'

'I've a chain — ' Anne ventured it diffidently from the corner to which she had withdrawn leaving the field clear for Alice to dress her mistress. 'You remember, madame? The one you gave me last Christmas. It belonged to your aunt, you said. You didn't like to wear it, now she was dead. If you wouldn't mind borrowing it back?'

'The very thing!' But while she waited for Anne to fetch the chain, sudden anger crimsoned her cheeks. She remembered those chains, gold filigree, so light, so intricately worked that their value, such as it was, lay in workmanship rather than weight of gold. They had bought them, her mother and Josephine's, one happy day when they had all gone into Paris together, to celebrate Josephine's twenty-first birthday. Later, parting, in tears, that desolate April of 1815, they had exchanged chains as a remembrance. Her mother's, which had been her aunt's, was in the tiny bundle of her own cherished possessions that she had given Anne to keep for her. But how could Josephine have parted with the other one, even to Anne? Or was Anne intending to produce her own, from that very bundle?

No, here she was, with the other one. 'I know you dislike the length,' she said, 'but I always did say that if you would

but wind it twice round, it would be quite the thing.'

'Yes.' The delicate tracery of gold did in fact soften the naked look of that low neckline. 'I was crazy to give it to you, Anne. May I be a brute and take it back again? I'll buy you another in the morning.' And then, dear God, what shall I use for money?

A tap at the door. 'Yes?' Alice opened it to one of the merry-looking little black boys Juliet had seen in the hall.

'The master says he and Mr. Jay are plumb hungry for their suppers!' He grinned saucily at Juliet and took an unceremonious leave, propelled, she thought, with some violence by Alice.

'Well, I'm ready,' she rose languidly, to be stopped by a horrified shriek from Alice.

'You're never going down without gloves!'

'Oh, pshaw! I can't be bothered with them tonight! If Mr. Jay don't like being treated as family, he needn't come.' And with this silencer, she swept out of the room.

She trod soberly down the short flight of steps that led from the bedrooms to the first floor, where, she knew, their less formal entertainments took place. The large party for Mr. Jay, next week, would be held mainly on the ground floor; today she would find her 'husband' entertaining his friend in the study he himself had designed. She crossed the hall, aware, as she looked fleetingly down over the balustrade to the lower one, of a little crowd of servants, their chattering suddenly hushed by her appearance. What a mercy she had learned the plan of this house so well. No need to hesitate for an instant as she made for the door at the right front of the upstairs landing. But now oddly Mr. Jay had set his doors, flat in the corners, under the sweeping curve of the ceiling.

She pushed it open and paused for a moment, unexpectedly delighted with what she saw. "Oh, Hyde's study,' Josephine had exclaimed impatiently. 'Full to the ceiling with books. Two sets, mind you! One at Savannah and one at Winchelsea.

You won't need to bother about that!' A great book, or even a small one, had always been a great evil to Josephine.

Juliet, on the other hand, had to tear her eyes away from those tantalising shelves to concentrate on the two black-garbed gentlemen who had risen to greet her. If Hyde had been elegant in his day-time grey suiting, in evening black he was superb. But it was Mr. Jay whom she must greet first. He was younger than she had expected and not quite so handsome as Josephine had led her to imagine. His evening dress looked, to her expert eye, as if it had been made for him, in a hurry, here in Savannah. He took her hand and pressed it a little too hard. 'At last,' he said.

'Have I been so long? I cry you a thousand pardons.' She turned to Hyde. 'And you, my dear.' Fantastic to be calling this stranger her dear. And then, her eye caught by the intricate folds of his cravat, 'My congratulations! A waterfall?'

He looked down at her (how tall he was) quizzically. 'You are quite out, my love. A *trône d'amour*. I try, you see, to live up to my occasions.' Now his glance was flickering past her to young Mr. Jay. What in the world had Josephine forgotten to tell her about *him*? Or was 'forgotten' the word?

Mercifully another little black boy bounced in at that point to announce that supper was served in the back parlour and she was able once again to demonstrate her schooling in the geography of the house as she led the way to the room at the opposite corner of the hall where a loaded table awaited them. Josephine had told her about her 'little suppers' but had hardly led her to expect the lavish variety of cold meats, oysters and various unrecognisable made dishes that were laid out among a profusion of silver, china and deeply cut glass.

The beauty of the 'little suppers', Josephine had explained, was that she had them so organised that, except for one change of courses, they could wait upon themselves. 'I call it a beaufet. It obviates all the misery of half-trained servants.'

It also had, tonight, the signal advantage that they were all

busy for a while pressing each other to the various dishes that stood ready on the table. Mr. Jay was so obviously hungry that Juliet thought this must be his first meal of the day and was happy to be occupied in pressing him to more cold turkey and ham, and keeping him well-supplied from the dish of delicious hot corn rolls that stood beside her. It gave her time to appreciate just what an odd trio they made. Mr. Jay took each dish from her hand as if she was giving him the keys of heaven. Hyde, facing him across the table, ate little, poured surprisingly good claret for them all, and kept the conversation going admirably on a variety of topics. Among so many other things she had forgotten, Josephine had failed to warn her of the width of his range. Maybe she had never noticed? Juliet found herself perpetually in a puzzle as to whether she should pretend ignorance of Sir John Sloane and Mr. Adam, or whether she must assume that Mr. Jay had told Josephine about them.

She compromised, said little, smiled a great deal, and ate hardly anything. At last, dessert finished, with the move back to the tea urn in the front parlour, they got down to the business of the evening, and she felt a good deal safer. Josephine had told her a great deal about the plans for the party that was to celebrate the new theatre's opening on 4th December. The elite of Savannah were to come back here after the performance for a little supper and a great deal of dancing. Mr. Jay's main anxiety seemed to be about how the guests would get from the theatre to the house.

'Yes,' said Hyde thoughtfully. 'It must be all of three blocks from Chippewa Square. Could you walk that, through our Savannah sand, in your little satin slippers, my love?'

'In the dark!' She made it a squeak of dismay.

'But if they wait for carriages,' said Jay gloomily, 'The party will hardly get started before morning.'

'It's a barbarous town, is it not?' Hyde sounded very cheerful about it. 'General Oglethorpe should have thought of sand, and

ladies' shoes, before he decided to build here. I agree with you about the carriages, Mr. Jay. What with the incompetence of the grooms and the delays of the ladies, we should have a traffic block that would last all night. So, I discussed this very question with my friend Scarbrough at the Exchange today and we agreed that there was nothing for it but to lay a carpet between the theatre and here.'

'A carpet?'

'Red, of course. Mr. Scarbrough thinks he has the very thing in his warehouse somewhere. He's to look it out tomorrow. He says he owes it to you for the trouble you are taking on that house of his.'

'You mean he'll lend the carpet?' Jay suddenly looked very young indeed.

'I think "give" would be a more appropriate word, don't you? I hardly imagine there will be much future, except as a souvenir, for a carpet that has lain in our Savannah streets all night. But it will add, will it not, quite a note to the festivities?'

'It certainly will.' Juliet thought it was time she joined in. 'But where will you have it laid, my dear? Down South Broad Street, I suppose?'

'Yes. With torch-bearers at the corners where they are needed. Scarbrough and I are asking all our friends with houses along the way to see that they are well illuminated. You'll speak to Mr. Richardson, Jay?'

'Their house is on the wrong side of the square,' objected Juliet, pleased with herself. 'Coming from the theatre, our guests will surely use the other side.'

'No harm in having the square well-lighted. We considered a bonfire in the middle. Scarbrough and I, but decided against it. The last thing we want is to start a fire.'

'I should think not indeed,' said Juliet warmly. 'And, besides, it might damage the Pride of India trees.'

'Quite so. But I have more news for you, my love. I know

Mr. Jay will be interested too. We have just heard from New York that the *Savannah* will be ready for her maiden voyage by spring.'

The *Savannah*? Juliet was lost. What in the world was he talking about? 'How delightful, my dear,' she made herself sound casual. After all, this must be the kind of matter of business with which Josephine had declared herself 'bored to distraction'.

And, mercifully, 'The steamship?' interjected Mr. Jay. 'She's to be finished at last! Now that is splendid news, sir. And what are your plans for her, pray?'

'Not mine. I'm but a sleeping partner in the affairs of the Savannah Steamship Company. But I think it is safe to assume they will want her down here for the start of her voyage to Europe. That should be quite a party too, should it not, my dear?'

'Oh, yes!' Eagerly. Parties, after all, were supposed to be her main concern. 'But I suppose that one will be the Countess's affair.'

'Mrs. Scarbrough?' His tone told her that he did not like the nickname Josephine had taught her so carefully. 'Yes. I believe she is hoping you will have finished their house by then, Mr. Jay.' Tactfully, he made it only half a question.

'Oh, so do I!' William Jay has had a good deal of wine. 'But my dear Mr. Purchis, you know as well as I do the difficulties under which I labour. The workmen! If work is the word. And, God bless her, then there is Mrs. Scarbrough herself. If she has changed her mind once, she has done so a hundred times. Now you were the perfect clients. You knew what you wanted. I did it. We are all satisfied.'

'Indeed.' Across the table, Hyde caught Juliet's eye. How in the world was she supposed to know what this matrimonial exchange meant?

'Yes, indeed,' she plunged in warmly. 'I never saw anything in Paris to touch it. Only, do you know, Mr. Jay, I cannot quite

get used to these square doorways tucked away under curving cornices.'

'What!' Now she had done it. 'But my dear — Mrs. Purchis —' Was the 'Mrs. Purchis' added as an afterthought? 'You said they were such a novelty!'

'Yes,' she said with satisfaction. 'That is just exactly what I think them.'

* * *

'He left early.' Hyde had just returned from seeing their guest downstairs. 'I'm not quite sure that he fancies you as a critic of architecture, my love.'

'Was it very bad of me?' Here was her chance to retrieve her blunder. 'I never meant to speak of it, only, just tonight I found it so particularly awkward to get my skirts through that odd little three-cornered opening. And you can see how difficult the — ' she had almost said 'slaves' — 'the servants find it.'

'Yes.' He laughed. 'Particularly with trays. Poor Mr. Jay, his theory is admirable, but I do think that perhaps he is a little short on the practical side. It will be interesting to see what he makes of Mr. Scarbrough's house.'

'Yes.' She was so tired that it was an effort to keep upright in her chair. What had Josephine said? 'No need to be troubling yourself about Hyde. The moment your guests leave, he will shut himself up in his study again. He always does.' But here stood Hyde — Mr. Purchis — her 'husband', very much at his ease, leaning against William Jay's Adam-style chimney-piece and looking down at her thoughtfully.

'You are sure you won't mind walking all the way home from Mr. Jay's theatre?' he asked now. 'We can hardly ask our guests to do so if we are not prepared to ourselves.'

'No, of course not. But — the carpet. It must cost a fortune!'

'You think us extravagant, Scarbrough and I? What a

delightful change, my dear. You will be telling me next that you have forsworn such fashionable gewgaws as jewels. I have been meaning, all evening, to congratulate you on your plain style. It becomes you.'

'Oh, la!' She laughed nervously. 'There's a story behind that. The most unfortunate thing. I have contrived to lose the key to my jewel boxes somewhere between here and Winchelsea. Mr. Jay must have thought me perfectly squalid.'

'I doubt that. If ever I saw a man being entertained by an angel, it was poor Mr. Jay. But how comes it that you did not apply to me for the other key? Surely you cannot have forgotten that I have kept it safe for you, ever since I bought you the boxes, with just such a possibility in mind.'

Idiot that she was! Of course there would be two keys. Now she was in the basket and no mistake. She yawned prettily. 'And disturb you when I knew Mr. Jay had already arrived? That would have been carrying domesticity pretty far, don't you think? Besides,' she rose and moved languidly to a gold-framed glass. 'I rather fancy myself like this. I believe I shall set a new style. Won't it just infuriate the Countess.'

'I wish you will not call her that.' His change of tone was frightening. 'She is the wife of my good friend and business associate. You have her permission, as I well know, to call her Julia. You will do so, if you please. If our small-minded Savannah ladies choose to mock her as a stranger you should be the first to take her part. After all, you are not exactly a native here yourself.'

'No, thank God,' she said pertly. 'But I am Mrs. Purchis of Winchelsea.'

For an extraordinary, suspended moment she thought he was going to strike her. Then the tension drained out of him, the black rage faded from his face and he leaned back once more against the marble chimney-piece. 'Why, so you are,' he said. 'And all the more reason for behaving like a lady, if you can.'

CHAPTER FOUR

Memory of that instant of swift, formidable rage haunted Juliet through the tightrope walk of the next days. Why had Josephine never warned her of her husband's temper? But then, with every anxious moment, she was realising just how little of real importance Josephine had, in fact, told her. Nothing surprising about that, perhaps. Josephine's idea of what was important and her own had always been totally different.

Anyway, she had little enough time for brooding as she inched her way, step by cautious step, into her role as Josephine. Inside the house, things were not too bad. She had managed to put names to most of the servants by now, and besides, 'I forget sometimes myself,' Josephine had said cheerfully. 'They breed so fast.' Josephine had also warned her not to interfere with old Venus's running of the household: 'I made a few changes when I first arrived . . . My little suppers; a few things like that. But in the main the only thing is to let her carry on in the old way; she's capable of nothing else.'

This was obviously true enough, but just the same it irked Juliet's tidy French soul to see the scrambling style of things, with three servants, in a muddled kind of way, trying to achieve together what one alone could have done much better. The food was delicious, but as it was cooked in a sinister shed in the back yard, and then brought laboriously indoors and upstairs, invariably cold.

'Just as well it's all going to be cold anyway for the party,' she told Anne over the late, luxurious breakfast in bed, which at once followed Josephine's habit and avoided the chance of meeting Hyde before he went out in the morning.

'Yes.' Anne looked anxious, as well she might. The party was now only two days off. 'Do you think you will be able to manage if madame doesn't get back in time?'

'I think I shall have to. It will be a miracle if she does, and I don't much believe in miracles. So come to the window, Anne, and let's see who is going by.' She pushed the tray down to the foot of the bed, reached for the swansdown-trimmed negligée that she privately detested, and swung her legs out of bed.

'It's a pity Mr. Purchis didn't build his house in one of the busier squares,' said Anne, joining her at the boudoir window. 'Now if we were in Reynolds, with the Planters' Bank, we'd have everyone by every day, but over here it's not so easy. Still,' brightening up. 'there's Mrs. Richardson getting into her carriage.'

'Oh, I know her. But who's that with her?'

'In the blue? Why, Mrs. Bolton of course.'

'Mr. Jay's sister? Anne, what in the world am I going to do about Mr. Jay?' On one pretext or another about the party, he had been a daily visitor, his infatuation almost comically obvious.

'What else can you do but what madame did? Let it go on and pretend to take no notice. It will do him no harm, poor young man. They all go through it, some time or other.'

'Yes.' Doubtfully. She had not managed to bring herself to tell Anne about Hyde's sudden, frightening fit of rage that first night, but thinking it over afterwards, had almost decided it must be due to jealousy. It was an alarming thought. If he was capable of jealousy still, could Hyde really be the passionless husband in name only that Josephine had described? She could hardly help a wry and private smile as she thought to herself how extraordinarily inconvenient it would be if Hyde should choose this particular moment to try and re-establish his relationship with his wife. She stopped smiling soon enough. Inconvenient? It would be disaster.

'Talking about the Planters' Bank,' she plunged into speech

to drown her thoughts. 'What in the world am I to do about money, Anne? I simply must have gloves that fit for the party! And the pairs I brought the other day for morning wear have exhausted the money Josephine left me. And I won't borrow your savings, either,' she anticipated Anne's next remark. 'You're an angel, but I won't.'

'You're sure you couldn't manage madame's signature? At the bank?'

'Quite sure. It's one thing to write little notes to her friends. Josephine's and my hands, both being French, are like enough to another, and unlike anything else here, so that I can manage that, but the Bank is something else again. Besides, I don't know how Joephine behaves there. No, it's hopeless.'

'You'll have to borrow from me,' said Anne stolidly. 'It's only till madame returns, after all. You can fix things better before next time.'

Next time? Would there be a next time? All her instincts warned her that this imposture was infinitely more dangerous than she had ever imagined it could be. 'Oh, well—' Once again she spoke to avoid thinking. 'Time to get dressed, I suppose. Ring for Alice, would you, Anne?' And then, at a gentle tapping on the door. 'Who's that? Oh—' She pulled the negligée more tightly round her at sight of Hyde, fully dressed to go out. He had never visited her in her room before, and his appearance now came all too alarmingly pat on what she had been thinking. In his *surtout*, mocked part of her mind, ridiculous. Anyway, thank God, Anne was there.

'Good morning.' If Hyde had noticed her look of surprise, he gave no sign of it. Anyway, she comforted herself, he was, by Josephine's report, a rare enough visitor so she had a right to look surprised. 'I'm sorry to disturb you so early,' he went on, closing the door quietly behind him, 'but I have been thinking about the party.'

She managed Josephine's laugh. 'As if we did anything else!'

'You don't find it tedious, I hope?' Was there a note of surprise in his voice?

'Good gracious, no! When did I ever find a party tedious? Surely you know me better than that! But, between you and me, and Anne here,' she smiled at him wickedly, 'I am beginning to find poor Mr. Jay and his constant visits just a trifle *ennuyeux*. If you should see him in town this morning, my dear [it was always a curious effort to call him that] and could manage to hint him away, if only for twenty-four hours, I would be your debtor for life.'

'Oh, in that case,' he advanced a disconcerting step nearer, 'and asked so charmingly, I will make a point of seeing him this morning and telling him you are suffering from a press of business. To tell truth, I had thought you found him entertaining.'

'Why so I do,' she hinted at a yawn. 'Within reason. But every day, you must admit, is the outside of enough.'

'I am delighted to find you share my feelings. The best young man in the world, but just a trifle obvious would you say?'

'I would indeed.' Her sigh of relief was genuine.

He smiled at her. 'If the worst comes to the worst, I'll make the supreme sacrifice and send him out to Winchelsea to consider "improvements" there.'

'Oh, I hope it won't come to that!'

'Frankly, so do I. I like the place very well as it is. But, talking of Mr. Jay and his party, I had almost forgot my errand to you. It occurred to me this morning that we are at the very end of the year. You might, if I know you, just possibly find yourself short of funds. So here, if you will accept it, is a small contribution towards your expenses for the party, which I have no doubt will be immense. You won't be insulted by cash, I hope? I happen to have a good deal by me, since the cotton crop sold so well.' And, to her unspeakable delight, he handed her a comfortably filled purse.

The touch of his fingers was electric, but, thank God, he did not feel it. And, thank God likewise, the blush she felt covering her face was reasonable enough, under the circumstances. 'La, my dear,' she smiled at him a little tremulously, but kept her tone light, 'You are too good! To tell truth, I have quite dreadfully outrun the constable and was at my wits' end where to turn! I have not even a pair of gloves fit to go with my new dress for the party. But you think of everything!'

'I do my best to. And, in fact, here is something else for you.' He reached into his pocket and handed her a small gold key on a length of finely wrought chain. 'I am sorry not to have given you this sooner, but I have been down to the locksmith's to have its mate cut, since the men could not find it in the wilds at Ruffton. In the meanwhile, I hope you will find the chain some substitute for the one you have lost.'

'Oh!' Could she think of nothing else to say? What a fool he must think her. 'You are too good. It's beautiful —'

'Like the wearer.' He smiled that heart-stirring smile of his. 'You will be glad to be reunited with your jewels, I know. I shall expect to see you in diamonds at least at Scarbrough's tonight. But I am keeping you from your *toilette*. With Anne and Alice, you will hardly need me to act your maid, as I used to in Paris.'

'I should rather think not! But, a thousand thanks, just the same.' Why was the picture of him acting as lady's maid to Josephine so intolerable? It was a relief to see the door close behind him. She turned to Anne. 'What diamonds?'

'I cannot imagine. He never gave her diamonds.'

'Strange. He was funning, I suppose. I wish I understood him, Anne.'

'Oh, well.' It was rough comfort. 'It's more than madame ever did.'

* * *

Josephine had had a dress specially made for the opening of the theatre, and the party to follow. 'No one's been inside the theatre,' she had explained. 'At least no one who counts. But by what Mr. Jay tells me it is to be a perfect riot of colour — gold, crimson and green. I'm sorry for the women who decide to wear colours. For me, I shall be all in white, with just the faintest touch of silver.'

It was the most beautiful dress Juliet had ever seen, and she actually spared a moment to feel sorry for her cousin who would have delighted in the occasion she, herself, so dreaded. 'You've lost more weight,' said Anne disapprovingly as she watched Alice's neat hands at work on the dress's tiny buttons.

'Well, do you wonder!' And then, remembering Alice. 'With all the preparations for tonight's party! I wish to goodness Hyde had not insisted on inviting Mr. Jay to dine first: I would much liefer be alone.'

'The master's mighty sociable these days.' Alice stepped back to study the fit of the dress. 'I don't remember so much dining and wining since the old mistress was alive.'

'Yes, I'm quite worn out with it.' Juliet was also very much puzzled. What had happened to the man Josephine had described as 'socially a barbarian'? Had he gone through some kind of change of heart while his wife was away at Winchelsea? They had not sat down alone together once since she arrived. Admittedly this had all kinds of advantages for her, since it both spared her the hazards of *tête-à-têtes* with him and gave her a chance to meet, one by one, or two by two, the people who were to be her guests tonight. But just the same, it would be a crowning mercy if she got through the evening without some disastrous *faux pas*.

'It's beautiful!' Alice was satisfied.

'Yes — ' Doubtfully. The stark white tissue, with its thin thread of silver was undoubtedly the most ravishing dress she had ever seen. The only trouble was that it showed her

frightened face, under the heavy auburn hair, white as a ghost's.

'Just the faintest touch of colour?' Alice's hand reached knowledgeably for one of the little pots of French make-up that Juliet had investigated with distaste.

'No!' And then, more mildly. 'Not tonight, thank you, Alice. Remember, it is bound to be scorching hot in the theatre, so crowded as it will be. I shall have colour enough by then. Yes, the pearls, I think.' What a disaster if she should lose them. Most things Josephine would forgive, but not that. Better to lose her husband? It was a disturbing thought.

'And for your hair?'

'I don't know.' She was interrupted by Venus's son Sam with a florist's box. 'Oh, how lovely. But where in the world — ' It contained two perfect white camellias, and a note: 'Rare for the rarest, fair for the fairest: wear them tonight for me.' And an intricate pair of initials so intertwined, so idiosyncratic that they might have stood for almost any pair of letters in the alphabet.

'The very thing!' As Juliet puzzled over the note, Alice had taken the flowers and was already busy working them into her crown of hair. 'Someone must adore you, ma'am, to find you camellias at this time of year.'

'Oh, a piece of nonsense.' She managed to make it sound as casual as Josephine would have, but it was with a new burden added to her load of anxiety that she swept down the stairs. The giver of the flowers would expect to be thanked. She would very much rather not be wearing them, but what in the world else could she do?

For the first time, Mr. Jay was late. She had taken it for granted that he would be here by now, and was not quite able to restrain her tiny twitch of dismay at sight of Hyde awaiting her, alone, in the study.

'Your gallant comes late.' Had he noticed? 'But you must forgive him, this once, since he must be nearly mad with

anxiety. If I had not compelled him to come here, I am quite sure he would have eaten nothing all day.'

'It was good of you to think of it.' If only he was not quite so frighteningly handsome in full evening dress.

'How fine we are!' Could he have read her mind? 'I tell you, my dear, your appearance quite reconciles me to the fag of all this dressing up. The flowers, I take it, are a well-earned tribute from Mr. Jay?'

Immensely tempting to let him think so, but impossibly dangerous. 'Why, no,' lightly. 'They are from an unknown admirer; is it not the most romantic thing? He hides behind a pair of initials so illegible that I defy his own mother to recognise them.'

'Oh, in that case, I rather think we might dispense with his flowers, if you are agreeable? I had had it in mind that this was the night for you to appear in these.' He picked up a set of jeweller's boxes from the table beside him. 'I think my mother would have wished it. And, if I may take a husband's liberty, they will add a touch of colour which your delightful appearance somewhat lacks.'

'You are too good.' How useful formal phrases were. She opened the small box at the top of the pile, and green fire flashed out at her from a pair of earrings. 'Emeralds!'

'*The* emeralds,' he corrected her. 'The Winchelsea emeralds. And your birthstone, as you have reminded me, from time to time. I do hope, my dear, that you approve of the way I have had them reset for you. They were quite gothic before, if I remember your words correctly.'

Josephine's birthstone, not hers. An absurd wave of superstitious terror washed over her as she forced herself to open the other cases, revealing a close-fitting necklace of the same brilliant, unlucky gems and then an exquisitely designed flower piece to be worn in the hair. 'You see,' he said, as she gazed at this, 'we shall be able to dispense with Mr. Incognito's tribute.'

'And I'm glad of it.' She moved over to the glass. Characteristic of Josephine that there was a gold-framed glass in every public room in the house. Her hands shook a little as she removed the camellias. Unlucky to wear them? Unluckier still to wear emeralds that were not her own?

'You must let me help you.' He threw the camellias in the trash basket, then moved over to stand behind her, his tall figure dominating hers in the glass. 'You were used to think me a handy enough lady's maid.' He took the emerald flower from her trembling hand and adjusted it neatly among her glowing curls. 'There, that's better. And the necklace.' A strange, long shudder went through her as his warm hands fastened it round her cold neck, but he seemed to notice nothing. 'No doubt you would prefer to put the earrings on yourself.'

'Oh, yes, thank you.' Her hands shook so much that this was almost impossible, but Mr. Jay's appearance provided the distraction she needed. By the time he had done apologising to Hyde for his deplorable lateness, the earrings were safely in place.

They had champagne to drink Mr. Jay's health and success to his theatre, and Juliet felt her courage rise with the bubbles in her glass. But when old Adam, the waiter, came to fill it for the third time, Hyde's outstretched hand prevented him. 'Forgive me, my dear, but we have a long evening ahead of us. Mr. Jay and I will need cool heads too, before it is over.'

For a moment, she was furious; she needed that extra glass! Then, incorrigibly, she shook with internal laughter. So this was marriage. Disconcertingly, Hyde's eyes met hers, laughing too. 'A husband's privilege, my dear, and may I say how well that angry colour suits you?'

* * *

Mr. Jay's theatre was overwhelming. As guests of honour, Juliet and Hyde found themselves in the first row of boxes, just

to the right of the seats reserved for the mayor and the other dignitaries of the town. They had arrived early, for Mr. Jay's sake, and as the theatre filled up with a brilliantly dressed crowd, Juliet had ample time to look about her. Gilded columns supported the first row of boxes, golden eagles adorned them and crimson panels separated each one from the next. The seats, too, were crimson, though, looking down, she could see that those in the pit were green.

'And look at the curtain!' Hyde's voice was dry.

'I was! What in the world do you think it represents?'

'He laughed. 'Ingrate! Poor Mr. Alton spent the longest dinner I have ever sat through telling you all about it, and now you ask me what it represents!'

'Good God!' She made a quick recovery. 'That prosy bore! You expect me to listen to him! I remember about the temple, of course, but who in the world are the ladies in front of it?'

'The Muses, my dear. And the gentleman they are pulling along with them is Shakespeare himself.'

'Yes,' she admitted. 'I should have remembered that. And of course the plump gentleman in the foreground is Falstaff.'

'Precisely. Just as the one in the scarlet tartans is Macbeth. Entirely surrounded by the weird sisters — but you will doubtless not have heard of them.'

'No.' Josephine had never looked at a play of Shakespeare's. 'They look a disagreeable set to me.'

'Not what one would choose for one's dearest friends,' he agreed with her gravely. 'But, seriously, my dear, what do you think of Mr. Jay's masterpiece?'

'Sumptuous.' She turned to face him. 'And vulgar beyond belief.'

'I am relieved to find that you agree with me. But we shall be in a minority, I am sure, and a silent one, of course.'

'Of course. Poor Mr. Jay.'

'Nothing of the kind. Listen!'

And indeed the house echoed with a buzz of enthusiasm. 'At

least it's safe,' Hyde went on. 'These gilded pillars are all of the best cast iron, and you can see how many entrances there are, in case of fire. But here come the big-wigs.'

Naturally, Josephine would know them all. The formal greetings, the bowing and curtseying were an agony to Juliet, but the very formality of the occasion was her salvation. They were safely seated at last, and she did not think she had betrayed any fatal ignorance. If only she could feel equally secure about the party that was to follow the performance. The theatre held a thousand people, but it was safe to assume that her guests would be in the boxes around and above her. She strained her eyes, trying to see how many of her visitors and the passers by from the square she could recognise in the full panoply of evening dress, with hair piled high and trimmed with flowers, feathers, and even, in one remarkable case, artificial fruit. When the lights were dimmed at last, and Mr. Cherry's play, *The Soldier's Daughter* began, she leaned back in her seat with a sigh of relief. No need, at least, to pay attention to this.

But the interval presented a new hazard. Everyone rose to troop out to the lobby and refreshment rooms at the front of the building. She thought for a moment of pleading fatigue and suggesting that they stay where they were, but it would be too hopelessly out of character. Besides, in this kind of casual intermingling, she might have a chance to identify a few more of her prospective guests.

The refreshment room to which Hyde led her was decorated in the same lavish style as the rest of the building. 'Wait here.' He settled her on a crimson plush seat. 'You would like a cold drink, I am sure. It's deplorable that we still have no ice in Savannnah, but doubtless they will have done their best.'

'Yes, please.' The champagne's glow had faded now, leaving her tired and dry. It was a relief to be alone for a moment in a crowd every member of which was concerned with the immediate problem of securing refreshments. Miraculously, Hyde had

led her to a seat that stood a little by itself. On a larger one, beyond a golden pillar, a group of red-faced women were vigorously fanning themselves and complaining, loudly, of the heat. She was almost sure that Josephine would not know them. But the fan was an admirable idea. She opened hers in her lap and made a little business of smoothing out its ostrich plumes. Much safest not to look about her and so risk cutting one of Josephine's dear friends.

'At last!' The deep, angry voice drew her eyes up with a start. He loomed over her, dark, bewhiskered, sallow-complexioned, furious. 'I should have known better than to look out for my flowers,' he went on. And then, with a sneer. 'Naturally, they could hardly compete with the Winchelsea emeralds. My congratulations on prising them out of old tightfist at last. My camellias, I assume, were exactly the lever you needed. But a line of thanks, of apology even, might not have come amiss.'

'I am so sorry.' No; Josephine would not apologise. She made herself smile up at him, archly. 'That you are disappointed.' The smile became genuine as she remembered Hyde tossing the camellias into the trash basket. It served this bad tempered stranger richly right. 'But you have it exactly, of course. What is even the rarest flower compared to an emerald?'

'I said, "Wear them, tonight, for me."' This man was dangerous.

'Why, so you did.' She was frightened, but would not show it. 'But, you see, I had to wear the emeralds – '

'For me.' Hyde's voice saved her. 'I am glad to see you safe back from your Spanish venture, Fonseca. Sooner, surely, than you had intended?'

'Much sooner.' He turned the full blast of his fury on Hyde. 'Since some blabbermouthed jackass chose to blow the whole affair to the Spanish authorities. I found them waiting for me at the border. Oh, as courteous as you please, and be damned to them — '

'Ladies are present,' Hyde interrupted him.

'A lady?' He favoured Juliet with a comprehensive, withering scrutiny, then looked beyond her to the red-faced group who had stopped their chatter to listen, open-mouthed, to his angry voice. He made them a sweeping bow, 'Your pardon, ladies, I quite forgot where I was.'

'Sir — ' But Hyde was silenced by the loud clangour of the bell that summoned the audience back for the farce. At once, the crowded room was in a whirl of movement; the red-faced women leapt to their feet as if in some kind of a race and swept between Hyde and Fonseca, but not, Juliet thought, before one long, speaking glance had passed between them. Then Hyde was putting the untasted drink carefully down on the flat head of a gilded cupid. 'Forgive me for being so long, my dear. The crowd at the bar was quite intolerable. Let us wait here, shall we, until the worst of the press is over?'

'Yes, do let us. But, Hyde — ' How could she ask it? 'Mr. Fonseca — '

'Is in a very bad temper,' he said equably. 'Having had his plan to have a parcel of slaves smuggled north out of Florida blown to the Spanish authorities. Though I don't know what else he expected when he talked about it all over town before he left. I heard of it from a dozen sources and I have no doubt that you had it from the man himself. How else could so devoted a cavalier have explained his expected absence from your party? I suppose he was invited, by the way?'

'Good God, how should I remember?' They were back in their seats, the curtain was rising for the farce, she had no further chance to ask about that significant exchange of glances between the two men. Probably she was refining too much upon it. It was true that southern gentlemen had an appalling reputation for fighting duels over the merest trivialities, but Hyde was not like that. He was civilised.

Their seats had been chosen near one of the entrances, so that they were able to slip out while the house was still ringing with

applause as much for Mr. Jay's theatre as for the performance itself, which, in so far as she had noticed it, Juliet had thought indifferent enough. 'I cheated, I'm afraid.' Hyde led her over to his sulky which was waiting in the lane behind the theatre. 'Thank you, Satan, I'll drive.' He laughed, as he helped her up. 'Avoiding Scarbrough's red carpet as best I may. But as host and hostess it strikes me that we have a duty to be there first.'

'A good many other people seem to have cheated too.' The square and the roads round it were thronged with carriages.

'Yes. I thought that carpet one of Scarbrough's wilder ideas. I wish he had less imagination and more bottom, that man. I am sometimes afraid that he may come to grief.' And then, quickly. 'I should not have said that. For God's sake forget it, and, for mine, mention it to no one.'

'Of course not.' Lucky for him, she thought, that it was to her, not to Josephine, that he had made this rash confidence. 'But Hyde,' she went on. 'Your affairs are so mixed up with his. What about the steamship, the *Savannah*?'

'Oh, I'm not too anxious about that,' he said cheerfully. 'I don't see how she can fail to be a money-spinner. Besides, my dear, you must remember that I am not merely a man of business. I have Winchelsea behind me. Which reminds me,' they were entering Oglethorpe Square now. 'I have been away from there altogether too long. Will it suit your book, my love, if we plan to move there tomorrow, or at latest the day after?'

'What?' Plans fell around her ears like castles of cards. 'So soon?'

'It's three weeks to the day until Christmas.' He slowed the horses outside the brilliantly lighted entrance to the house. 'The first Christmas I shall have celebrated at Winchelsea since 1814. Can you not understand how I long to be there? And to have you there at my side,' he added, as he jumped down to anticipate the servant who had come forward to help her alight. He took her arm to lead her up the curving stairway to the front door. 'Say you will accompany me tomorrow? Please?'

It was, extraordinarily, a word she had never heard him use before. His arm in hers was another kind of plea, one she would not quite let herself understand. No time to be thinking about that. No time even to wonder how in the world she and Josephine would make the exchange which was due any day now, if she had been carried off to Winchelsea. Moses, the old butler, was waiting for them in the lighted doorway, beaming all over his face. 'You're as good as your word, sir; you said you'd be first, and first you is.'

'Well?' Hyde smiled at Moses but held her back just for a moment.

'Of course, if you wish it.' What else could she say.

'Good.' He led her into the lighted hall. 'Naturally we are first, Moses. Is all ready? But I know I need not ask.' And then, to Juliet. 'Up with you quick, my dear, and take off your cloak. Our guests are beginning to arrive already, I rather think. I told you we were not the only ones who cheated.'

'Anne, who's Mr. Fonseca?' Juliet had sent Alice for a glass of water.

'Dear God, is he back?'

'Yes, and in a black rage, because he sent me camellias and I didn't wear them. Well, you can see — '

'Yes.' Anne bent forward to give the emerald hair-piece a loving little pat into place. 'The Winchelsea emeralds. Won't Madame Josephine just be mad as fire when she hears you were the first to wear them. She's been after them ever since we got here. But Mr. Fonseca's back? That's bad news. She was so sure he'd be gone for a month or more.'

'Yes. Something went wrong with his plans. The Spanish were waiting for him at the frontier. I don't rightly understand. But there's no *time*, Anne. Tell me, quick, what is he to my cousin? You can see, I have to know.'

'I wish *I* knew,' said Anne. 'Or rather.' Sombrely. 'I wish I didn't think I knew.'

'I was afraid it was like that. From the way he spoke. For a

moment, I was afraid he and Mr. Purchis were going to quarrel. Oh, Anne, I do *hope* he doesn't come to the party.'

'He'll come,' said Anne. 'And you must just see to it that you are not alone with him. Ah, thank you, Alice.'

Juliet was glad of the water, with its momentary excuse to linger. But — 'They're arriving in throngs now,' said Alice.

'Then I must go down.'

She found Hyde receiving guests at the foot of the main stairway. 'There you are, my dear,' he tucked her arm into his 'You know Mr. Troup, of course.'

The immense red-headed, red-eyebrowed politician had been one of the party of chief citizens at the theatre and he was indeed a figure it was impossible to forget. 'Of course I do. You enjoyed the play, sir?'

But the queue of guests behind was too pressing for him to be able to answer. To her relief, she found that names were unimportant in this throng of people. It was merely to smile, to shake hands, to mutter some nothing about the play, or the theatre, or Mr. Scarbrough's red carpet, and then start all over again. Only, once, was there a tiny pause, an imperceptible jolt in the smooth proceedings. She had looked over the heads of their neighbours the Richardsons to see the tall black figure of Mr. Fonseca towering behind them. His grip on her hand hurt. 'Ride with me tomorrow. Our time, our place.' His low voice was covered by the Richardsons who were still exclaiming to Hyde about the differences between their two Jay-built houses.

'I am so sorry.' She smiled up at him innocently. 'We leave for Winchelsea in the morning.'

His lips framed a word she preferred not to recognise. Then, 'At Winchelsea, in that case. Our *rendezvous* there.' And, louder, 'I shall count on the first waltz.'

'Then you will be disappointed,' Hyde had disentangled himself from the Richardsons and held out a cool hand to Fonseca. 'My wife and I have decided that the waltz may be all

very well in Europe, but it is hardly the thing for one of our Savannah parties. But I am sure she will be able to favour you with a quadrille. Not the first, my love, which you must dance with our guest of honour, Mr. Jay, not the second, which I reserve for myself.'

'The third then.' Once more, the queue was pressing from behind, and Fonseca moved on, with a black glance for Hyde.

'No waltzes?' The lady of the following couple had heard the exchange. 'But how gothic, Mr. Purchis.'

'We are gothic at Winchelsea, Mrs. Brimmer.'

After Fonseca, Jay's respectful adoration was pure pleasure. Dancing the first quadrille with him, Juliet was almost able to relax, to consider the possibility of enjoying this evening. But how could she, with Fonseca always somewhere visible, watching her, black-browed, furious. Still, at least she did not have to waltz with him. There was something puzzling about that too. 'You never told me there was to be no waltzing,' she said to Hyde as they formed their lines for the second quadrille.

'Did I not? How very remiss of me. My apologies my dear.' He bowed to her formally and the dance began.

Conversation, except in the briefest snatches, is almost impossible in a quadrille. 'You are driving me mad,' Fonseca managed, once, as they moved past each other.

'I do not intend to.' They were parted, inexorably, by the movement of the dance.

'Sit the next one out with me.' They met again.

'Impossible, I have partners for all evening.'

'I shall come to Winchelsea,' the dance was over and they were standing for a moment among a crowd busy seeking new partners.

'Oh, pray — ' she had been about to say don't, but that would never do. She smiled up at him roguishly. 'I vow sir, you are the most impossible tease in creation.' And then, sighing with relief. 'Yes, Mr. Bolton, it is indeed your dance.'

But, 'Pray, what?' Fonseca would not let her go.

'Pray bring me some more of those ravishing camellias, sir.' She smiled, curtsied, took Mr. Bolton's arm and left him.

CHAPTER FIVE

Waking to exhaustion and a house in chaos, Juliet found herself actually glad of the proposed move to Winchelsea. True, it meant going once more through that tightrope business of pretending to know her way round a house she had never seen before. 'And Winchelsea is huge,' Josephine had warned her. But on the other hand it would get her safely away from the flood of post-party calls that would, otherwise have been inevitable, and, best of all, away from Mr. Fonseca. Perhaps, by the time he came to Winchelsea, Josephine would be back.

Juliet's first thought, when she was dressed, was to send Satan off with a message to the faithful old servant whom Josephine had left in the house beyond Ruffton, both as caretaker, and, in just such a crisis as this, as means of communication. When she got back from Norfolk, Josephine would go to the Ruffton house first, would learn of the move to Winchelsea, and change her plans accordingly.

Satan had only just left when Hyde came tapping at the door of her boudoir, and she could not help a start of alarm at the thought of what he might have overheard. Mercifully, he seemed to have noticed nothing. 'Are you quite worn out from last night?' he asked. 'Am I a brute to suggest we move today?'

'No, no. I am quite looking forward to it. To tell truth, a little Savannah society goes a long way with me. After last

night, I am more than ready to ruralise for a while, I can tell you! And think of the visits of congratulation we will be spared!'

'Yes, indeed.' He surprised her by taking her hand and kissing it. 'A most successful party, thanks to you, my dear.'

'Oh, pshaw! You know perfectly well I had nothing to do with it. Venus and the rest of them did all the work; I merely danced and enjoyed myself.'

'Which is why you look, if I may say so, a trifle fagged this morning? Will you think me a quite medieval husband if I suggest that you go on ahead to Winchelsea as soon as you are ready? It will save you a plague of morning callers.'

'But what about you?'

'I shall join you later. Either tonight or tomorrow morning. A small matter of business has come up, on Scarbrough's behalf. You remember, I am sure, what I was saying to you about him last night?' His look warned her not to refer to Scarbrough's troubles in front of Alice, who was busy in the next room.

'Of course I remember. But you'll not be long? I don't much fancy acting Robinson Crusoe out there at the plantation!' She was sure Josephine would make the complaint, though privately her heart was singing with relief. How much easier to reach the house at Winchelsea with only servants to see if she made any mistake.

'You'll give my kindest regards to Aunt Abigail.' His next words reminded her of a hazard she had quite forgotten. 'And tell her I hope to see her this evening, or tomorrow at the latest. I have given all the orders for your trip, so now, if you will excuse me, I will wish you a pleasant one, and take my leave.'

'Yes — yes, of course. God knows, I've a million things to see to if I'm to leave this morning.' And then, as one of Josephine's careless afterthoughts. 'I hope your business goes well.'

'So do I.'

What was there about his tone? 'Hyde!'

'Yes?' He had his hand on the door-knob.

'You're not . . . It's not . . .' Suddenly, vividly, the image of Fonseca rose before her, black-browed and dangerous, as she had seen him last night.

'It's a little business for Scarbrough,' he said again, patiently. 'Can I do anything in town for you, my dear? And trifles you need for your exile in the wilderness?'

'Not a thing, thank you.' Absurd to have imagined he was concerned with anything more than Mr. Scarbrough's debts. She watched the door close behind him, then turned to Alice. 'Call Anne for me, Alice? If we are to get off this morning, there's not a moment to be lost.'

* * *

Having affronted Satan by refusing to take the sulky, Hyde Purchis walked briskly down Abercorn Street in the direction of the Bay, then turned west along it towards the Exchange. At every step he met an acquaintance, or a guest from the night before, and stopped, cheerfully, to exchange comment or receive congratulation. The splendid opening of Mr. Jay's theatre was everybody's subject, Savannah felt itself a city indeed today.

Hyde stopped at the Vendue House for a quick look at the advertisements displayed there. Runaway slaves . . . a sale of merchandise from a recently arrived ship . . . a young lady who taught French . . . a young gentleman called Fremont who taught dancing. Nothing there to interest him. He paused outside the Exchange, then seemed to change his mind and went back to the City Hotel where he asked his old friend the landlady for pen and paper.

'Pen and paper, Mr. Hyde?' She had known him from a boy. 'What trouble has that French lady of yours got you into now?'

So it was all over town already. It was only what he had

expected. 'Trouble?' He could be crushing when he wished. 'None that I know of, and I'll be grateful if you'll say so if anyone should speak of it. Mrs. Purchis has gone to Winchelsea today, to open the house for Christmas, but I have a little business to transact before I join her.'

'I'll bet you have, Mr. Hyde, and good on you for transacting it.' She spoke with a marked Irish brogue. 'I'll wish you joy, and good luck, me boy, and here's your pen and paper. And a dram to go with it?'

'No, thanks.'

'No.' She took the refusal philosophically. 'You was always a steady one, warn't you? Does Mr. Fonseca know what a devil you are with a pistol?'

'I doubt it.' The direct question merely confirmed what he had suspected. 'He will find out.' He was writing rapidly. 'There.' He put down the pen. 'Perhaps you would do me a further kindness and have one of your boys put that on the board at the Vendue House? At the very top, mind? Where it catches the eye?'

'Thank the Lord Jasus my old father taught me my letters.' She was unashamedly reading over his shoulder. 'Oh, good, Mr. Hyde, that's right down good. I telt them and I telt them you'd know how to set about it. Thank you, sir.' She took the coin he held out and hurried off to do his errand.

The notice, carefully affixed at the very top of the board, where it quite obscured the runaway slaves and most of the miscellaneous merchandise offered for sale, was short and simple:

> 'Having been called a blabbermouthed jackass
> at his own party, Hyde Purchis demands the
> satisfaction of a gentleman from Charles
> Fonseca, though he recognises that this is
> probably too much to expect.
>
> (signed) Hyde Purchis.'

Leaving the City Hotel, Hyde walked casually in the other direction from the Vendue House. Much better not to meet Fonseca until he had read the challenge and decided how to act on it. Not that he had much choice, if he wished to go on living in Savannah. Hyde looked at his watch. It had taken him longer than he had thought to compose that carefully worded challenge. The boat for Winchelsea should be leaving any minute now. He gave way to impulse and crossed the bluff to take one of the sloping paths down to the wharf.

He was just in time to watch his boat pulling away downstream, and found himself oddly sorry that he had not been a moment sooner. But at least she was safe away. The rowers were beginning to sing now, one of the melancholy songs that many overseers and drivers discouraged:

'Die on the field of battle,
Die on the field of battle,
Glory in my soul.'

A cold shiver ran through him as the words brought home to him the full enormity of what he was about to do. He had shot game, here on the swamps and islands of the Savannah river, ever since he was a boy, and, while in Paris, had amused himself perfecting his markmanship in a gallery run by one of Napoleon's Old Guard at the Palais Royale. But, so far, a reasonable man, he had contrived to avoid the duels that sprang up so easily here in the south. And this was not a duel: not really. It was murder, cold, premeditated murder. Fonseca was known for a quick draw and a wild shot. He himself was deadly at any range. But then, he comforted himself, Fonseca might decide that discretion was the better part of valour and take his adventurous self off to safer fields.

He doubted it. The trouble was that no one in town knew about those daily sessions of his at the Palais Royale. How should Fonseca know that he could shoot out a candle without

spilling a drop of wax? Josephine had loved to watch him do it and, in happier days, had liked, too, to go with him when he was shooting over an easy bit of country, to pick out the bird she wanted and clap her hands gleefully when he shot it down. Well, now he must shoot larger game on her behalf. He put cold hands in his pockets. No alternative, but he could not like it.

'Purchis!' These gloomy thoughts had brought him along below the bluff to where the packets landed, and now a man of about his own age had broken out of a stream of disembarking passengers and dropped the two portmanteaux he carried to hold out both hands in enthusiastic greeting, 'By all that's wonderful! I was just going into town to ask for your direction.'

'Everett!' Hyde was no less delighted. Sam Everett, a New Englander, had been his closest friend through the years of exile at Harvard College. They had not met in the ten years since they graduated, but, 'I'd have known you anywhere,' said Hyde.

'And I you.' They had stopped their enthusiastic hand-shaking now, and picked up a portmanteau each, ignoring the black boys who swarmed round with offers of service.

'You'll stay with us, of course.' Here was exactly the man he needed.

'I'll be delighted.' And then, '"Us?" You're never married!'

'I most certainly am. To a French lady to whom I hope to be able to present you very soon. But in fact I have but now been seeing her off to Winchelsea.'

'Ah! The Old Plantation Home. Lord, how we used to tease you over that, and how you did rise to it! Tell me, Hyde, if I may ask, did you manage to free those slaves of yours when you inherited?'

'Free them? Good lord yes. It's getting free of them that's my problem.'

'You mean they're still with you?'

'Where else. In fact — ' He raised his voice. 'Hey, you, Pete and Jim!'

'Yes, sir!' Two small boys came running up from the quay.

'Take these bags back to the house for me, would you? And tell Venus to expect a guest tonight.'

'Sho' thing, sir.' And then, hesitantly. 'We met old Andy down by the river. He allows as how that Mr. Fonseca do be roaring up and down town like Goliath of Gath a looking for you.'

'Thank you, Sam. If you see Andy again, tell him I'm looking for Mr. Fonseca.'

'I sholy will.' And the two boys picked up the portmanteaux as if they weighed nothing and scampered off up the bluff.

'And who, pray, is Mr. Fonseca?' The two young men had come to a halt by mutual consent and stood idly gazing at the great piles of merchandise on the wharves: tea from China, sugar from the West Indies, great bales of cotton still waiting to be shipped out, and, nearer at hand, the cargo of northern manufactured goods that had come down on the packet in which Everett had arrived.

'Fonseca is a problem.' Hyde took his friend's arm and steered him back along the quayside to where the wharves thinned out towards Fort Wayne. 'And one I'd better tell you about before I ask you to act as my second.'

'Your second, by God! You, Hyde? The quiet one; old Hyde who hides his feelings; you are going to fight a duel? I know you southerners are fire-eaters, but, Hyde, think again.'

'I have thought. And again. Don't think I like this; I don't. But I have to go through with it. And it would be the most immense comfort to me if you would stand my second. But, in fairness, I must tell you, I mean to kill my man.'

He said it so coolly that it took a moment for it to penetrate. Then Everett gasped like a fish. 'To kill! Hyde, you're joking.'

'I wish I were.'

'But, Hyde, why?' and then, colouring. 'Or should I not ask?'

'Why not? He insulted me, at my own party last night by suggesting that I had informed the authorities of a bit of skulduggery he was planning.'

'And so you mean to kill him? Hyde, I'm out of short coats, you know. But if that's the reason you intend to give — '

'It is.'

'And your mind's entirely made up?'

'Yes.'

'Then of course I'll stand your second. But what is the form down here? Pistols at dawn on the bluff?'

'No, no, nothing so barbarous. There's always the chance, of course, that my friend Fonseca, when he sees the notice I have posted about him, will seek me out and shoot me as I stand.'

'You sound very cool about it.'

'You may notice that we are standing in a comparatively inconspicuous position. Before we climb the bluff, I think you had better have my second gun.'

'You're armed!' The New Englander was amazed.

'I should hope so. Mr. Fonseca is not a very pleasant character. Here,' he handed over one of a pair of beautifully made duelling pistols. 'You can still shoot, I hope, even after ten years of law-abiding in New England?'

'A wafer, if necessary. But not Mr. Fonseca, I hope.'

'It may come to it.' Sombrely. 'I don't like to involve you in this, Sam.'

'I am involved.'

'Thanks. Well then. What I particularly wish to avoid is a vulgar brawl in town. If I had known you were coming, I would have planned it all differently, but at least, thank God, you are here. I've been away too long ... I've acquaintances by the score, business partners, but not a friend like you. By the way.' It showed his state of mind that this came out as an afterthought. 'What in the world are you doing here?'

'Earning my living, I hope. I've commissions from my father to a Mr. Scarbrough. I'm not my own man as you are, Hyde.'

'Scarbrough. The nearest I have to a friend. Your commissions will be no problem. So, we can concentrate, for the moment, on the matter in hand. If it's not to be a brawl, this meeting must be arranged by seconds — by you and whomever Fonseca can find to act for him. Will you mind, Sam, as a complete stranger, climbing up that bluff, crossing the green to the Exchange, and asking for Mr. Fonseca or his friends?'

'Why should I? It's an unusual mode of arriving in a new town, I'll say that for it. And, having found the detestable Fonseca or his friends, what next?'

'There's a choice of two accepted venues. One is the Jewish graveyard, half a mile out of town. No, I agree with you —' He had seen his friend's reaction. 'It's not my idea of a suitable spot either. The other is across there,' he pointed to where a ferry boat was starting its laborious way over from the far side of the swift-flowing river. 'They call it Screven's Ferry. It's on South Carolina soil, so if there should be any little legal difficulty, one can plead state's rights and God knows what of the kind.'

'And that's your choice. Two boats, or one?'

'I knew I could rely on you, Sam. Two, for God's sake. Fonseca and I would not be safe in one together. Besides, I don't wish to come back with his corpse afterwards.'

'You're very sure of yourself.' Everett felt a cold, superstitious prickle of fear down his spine. 'You've left all right and tight at home, I take it, just in case of any . . .' He hesitated . . .

'Accident? Oh yes. I made my will when we were married. There's nothing to change now.'

'A note for your wife?'

'No.' It was tempting. 'No, I think not. It won't be necessary, I tell you, and I'd feel a fool writing it. So off with you, Sam, there's a good fellow, and let's get this business done with as

soon as possible. Up the bluff, across the green, and you can't miss the Exchange ... If Fonseca's not there, try the City Hotel. Anyone will direct you. I'll be somewhere between here and the Fort.' He pointed downstream to Fort Wayne where it crowned the end of the bluff.

* * *

Charles Fonseca's second was small, Spanish-looking, and an anxious man. Neither of the principals had spoken a word since the four of them had met on the low, marshy ground below the ferry landing. Now he approached Sam Everett. 'An attempt at reconciliation?' Dubiously.

'Impossible.' He did not like saying it.

'What the hell are we doing wasting time like this?' Fonseca spat out his quid of tobacco close to Hyde's foot. 'Let's draw for position and be done with it. I've an appointment at four.'

He won the draw and a cast a quick, keen eye over the level ground that had been used so often, and so fatally, before. 'I'll take this end.' It was midday, and the sun was almost due south of them; his position would give him a slight but important advantage so far as the light was concerned.

'Very well.' It now fell to Sam Everett to give the word to fire. The two seconds placed their principals, ten paces apart, with their backs to each other. It was a ritual to which Sam was new, but Fonseca's second clearly knew his business. 'Very good.' Sam looked anxiously from Hyde to Fonseca. 'On the word, you will turn and fire, then advance two paces before your second shot. I shall count three, like this,' he demonstrated, 'then say , "stop", and it will be over.'

'Yes.' Fonseca's smile was a snarl. 'It will most certainly be over. So for God's sake let's begin.'

At this eleventh hour, Everett realised that there was no doctor, presumably, nearer than Savannah. But to raise this

objection now, would be merely to risk the stigma of cowardice, not only for himself but for Hyde. 'Are you ready, gentlemen?' His voice shook a little. Then, 'Fire!'

A swirl of dust as the two men turned, the crack of their shots, one just after the other but which? In his anxiety, Everett forgot for an instant to begin the vital count. Then, as Fonseca crumpled towards the ground, he began, 'One ... two ... three.' At the word 'stop' Fonseca had his pistol steady again, and fired from the ground.

'Well I'll be — ' In any other circumstances, Hyde's look of astonishment would have been comic. Then, carefully, husbanding his words, 'Don't mind it, Sam.' And he, too, swayed, fell, and lay still on the grey sand.

* * *

Juliet had enjoyed the trip downstream, with a light wind blowing her curls about her face and the mild December sun warming her. She sat, silent, all the way, listening to the rowers' strange, melancholy song and rehearsing herself in the arrangements of the big house at Winchelsea.

Just the same, when the rowers pulled into the well kept wharf and Satan jumped out to help her on shore, she could hardly restrain a gasp of surprise and pleasure. Josephine had told her, carefully, all about the physical details of the place, but had failed to tell her that it was beautiful. 'It's good to be back,' she smiled at Satan.

'Yes, ma'am.'

She had time, while they were busy landing the enormous quantity of baggage without which Josephine never seemed to travel, to look about and get herself placed. Downstream, a little way, was the Chinese pavilion Hyde had built for Josephine because she had read about the Prince Regent's curious palace at Brighton. 'A good place to be alone in,' Josephine had called it. Now, with a little pang of fear, Juliet wondered whether,

perhaps, it was also a good place to meet that frightening Fonseca. She must remember to ask Anne what his first name was, before she betrayed herself by ignorance.

But right now she was forgetting something. She turned impatiently to Satan. 'What in the world has become of the carriage?' she asked. 'Mr. Purchis said he had given every order for my trip. He can hardly have expected me to walk up to the house.'

'No, ma'am.' He smiled immensely at her and broke into a rather broader speech than he normally used. 'You done clean forgot that Mr. Purchis he don' like his horses brought down the bluff.'

'He might have this once!' She made her voice petulant. And then, 'Oh very well then. Anne, you lead the way, and for God's sake keep your eyes open for snakes.'

This was a much lower bluff than the one at Savannah, and she would probably have been aware of the carriage and horses that awaited her at the top if it had not been for the thick plantation of evergreens and the excited voices of the servants who had been busy carrying up Josephine's huge boxes. Deep, soft sand silenced the horses, but one of them let out a delighted whicker at sight of her, and she remembered, with pleasure, that this was something she and her cousin had in common. She patted the glossy nose and smiled at the man who held the reins. 'Well, Charon, and how are you?'

'All the better for seeing you, ma'am, and so are we all. And as for Miss Abigail, she's plumb tuckered out with pleasure and delight.'

'Then I'd better lose no time in joining her. The wagon is coming for the baggage?'

'Yes, ma'am, Mis' Josephine. Just as soon as you're safe home, I'll hitch up Shem there that's so pleased to see you and come down with the wagon. Ham's thrown out a splint,' he answered a question she should clearly have asked. 'But we're managing.'

'And Ariel?' Josephine would ask about her own riding horse before anything else.

'Fretting for exercise. Miss Abigail's not the only one will be glad to see you.'

'Good. I'll ride this afternoon.' And then, as she let herself be helped carefully into the huge, the antediluvian carriage, 'Oh, God,' to herself, 'suppose Fonseca comes?' 'Our *rendezvous*' he had said. And, earlier, of Savannah, 'Same time, same place.' But what time? What place? And what in the world should she do about him?

But Charon had shouted to his horses and they had churned up a great cloud of dust as they pulled the heavy carriage forward and round another plantation of evergreens to the beginning of the carriage drive Josephine had described. But description, and certainly Josephine's bored description, had given no idea of the reality. 'Ilexes,' Josephine had said, 'with that dreary creeper draped all over them.'

Juliet drew a deep, delighted breath. In front of her, the huge trees marched away on either side of the white, oyster-shell drive. Mild December sunlight filtered through the narrow, dark green leaves, and a light breeze stirred the strange grey drapery that hung, like curtains, like the back-cloth of a theatre, but quivering in the cool sunshine so as to turn the long drive into something from a fairy-tale, the road to the enchanted palace. Juliet felt a queer little shiver of apprehension run through her: what of the prince?

CHAPTER SIX

The house was huge. White and rambling among its protective magnolia and ilex trees, it testified, with here a verandah and there a handsome Greek portico to the varying taste of generations of Purchises. Surveying it, for a brief moment, as the carriage swung round the sweep to stop in front of the graceful flight of steps that led up to a pillared piazza, Juliet thought it at once the most beautiful and the most engaging house she had ever seen. Which Purchis had built that cupola at the corner, with its balustraded walk, and, no doubt, its view across the island to the sea? And who had added that ridiculous, delightful turret on the other side?

'There you are, ma'am.' Charon had the carriage door open and the steps down. 'Home at last.'

It felt like home. A blur of tears clouded her eyes. No time for that now. As in Oglethorpe Square, a happy crowd of servants thronged the steps. Was Josephine a better mistress than she would have imagined, or was this a tribute rather to Hyde?

Luckily, everyone wanted to know about the party the night before, and just when complete panic seized her at the discovery that she had forgotten the name of the Winchelsea housekeeper a clear, cool voice from above created an instant hush, 'Welcome home, Josephine.' And then, coming forward to the top of the steps, Abigail Purchis fluttered the whitest hands Juliet had ever seen. 'Scoot now! Vamoose! Am I to be the last to hear of last night's doings?' It was said with perfect good humour, and received in the same spirit, but with instant obedience. One moment they were in the midst of a chattering

crowd, the next, as Juliet climbed the last step, they were alone.

Josephine had said nothing about Abigail Pemberly's resemblance to her nephew. If he was handsome, she was beautiful, with the fine-boned, clear-eyed looks that age merely improves. Age? She might be anything from sixty to a hundred. Now she leaned down with a whiff of lavender, to submit to Juliet's kiss. 'Dear child.' It was mechanical. Then, eagerly. 'But Hyde? He's stayed with the baggage?'

'No, alas, aunt. He's stayed in Savannah. A small matter of business. He sent you his kindest regards and said to tell you he would be here tonight or tomorrow morning.'

'Oh.' In disappointment, the old face was suddenly a child's. 'He *said* he'd come today.'

'Then I'm sure he will.' Soothingly. 'But should we not go in? It's cold for you out here on the stoop.'

'Yes. It's always cold now.' She turned to lead the way in through wide-open double doors. 'You'll take a glass of something after your journey? I had his madeira brought up for Hyde.'

'The special one? Then we must give him a good scold when he gets here, for disappointing you. But you've my cherry bounce, too, I'm glad to see.' She had moved, unerringly, into the large room to the left of the entry that served as the family's meeting-place and parlour. Deplorable of Josephine to like cherry bounce, but there it was, and she was getting used to it.

It was darkish in this room, with its big screened porch and the tall magnolias beyond. 'Too cold for the porch.' Half a head taller than Juliet, Miss Abigail was thin as a ghost inside a cocoon of exquisite Indian shawls. 'Yes, I'll take my usual drop, thank you, dear. So disappointing about Hyde.' She settled herself with a tired little sigh in an upright chair whose exquisite faded embroidery must have been worked by Purchis hands long since white as oyster shells in the family lot down by the river.

Her usual drop of what? Juliet fought panic and made a business of removing her bonnet and shawl. Surely, with all those servants in the house, someone would appear to pour their drinks, and choose for Aunt Abigail the right bottle from that formidable array on the mahogany sideboard? Vain hope. She knew, by now, that Hyde loathed being waited on and loved his privacy. Normally, she agreed with him; today it was inconvenient beyond words.

Time was ticking away with the huge grandfather clock on the wide hall that ran from front to back of the house. She turned back to the long, tarnished glass there and patted her curls into place, wasting a fleeting thought on Josephine. This glass must date from before her time. She would have insisted on a clearer one.

'Aunt Abigail.' she took a steadying breath and went back into the parlour, where the old lady sat straight and still in her chair. If her hands were white, her face was whiter. She was too old, Juliet suddenly saw, to bear even the tiny disappointment of Hyde's late arrival. Or was it tiny? Was not Hyde the life of this huge, silent house? Without him, it stopped, and the clock's measured voice in the hall was merely a mockery.

'Aunt Abigail,' she said again.

'Yes, my dear?' Something inflexible about that courteous voice.

'Let's be wicked, as Hyde has failed us. Let's have a drop of something strong, shall we?' Her gaze flickered down the range of bottles. 'Just the tiniest drop of brandy?'

'But of course, dear.' The thin clear voice held a trace of impatience now. 'Do join me, if you wish. I never did think much of that cherry bounce. Such an uninteresting drink, and such a vulgar name. No, no, child! What's become of your wits? Not those tiny glasses! Surely you've not forgotten what grandfather used to say? "A good brandy is like a beautiful woman . . . to be taken slowly, and with respect." ' She laughed, her silvery, exquisite laugh. 'I have so often wondered what he

meant, yes, that's right!' Her glance into the past had given Juliet time to discover the huge brandy glasses on the second shelf of the sideboard. 'He brought them over on the *Anne*,' said the old lady, accepting hers. 'I've always thought it must have been most deplorably crowded, that ship. And now, child, sit down, stop hovering, and tell me, how is Hyde?'

'Why, very well, as usual, but a trifle preoccupied with Mr. Scarbrough's affairs.'

'Oh, that's it!' The old lady had taken a stiff swig of her brandy and looked, all of a sudden, formidably intelligent and more like Hyde than ever. 'If it's only Mr. Scarbrough.' She stopped for a moment, gazing through the Chinese painting on the wall like a clairvoyant. 'I told Hyde how it would be when he married — Mr. Scarbrough, I mean.' Her voice held, for an instant, a note of apology. 'Julia Bernard was bound to be a demanding wife. Those Baltimore belles have always had more hair than wit. But he wouldn't listen to me. Hyde, I mean. And quite right too.' She took another good draft of her brandy. 'Purchis of Winchelsea has never failed a friend yet. And can afford to stand by them, too.' Her glass was empty. 'You'll want to be unpacking. Pour me another drop before you go. And ring for Aaron, pray. That madeira will be best back in the cellar until Hyde gets here. Tonight, you say?'

'Or tomorrow.' There was something rather frightening about the old lady's preoccupation with her nephew. Or was he her great-nephew? What in the world *had* Josephine said about her?

* * *

The baggage wagon had driven round to the back entrance while Juliet had been talking to Miss Abigail. Now, she found Anne hovering in the long hall.

'Alice is unpacking for you, madame.' Her look held a question.

'That's good.' The hall seemed empty, but just the same she felt as if it were all one huge, suspicious ear. 'Tell her I'll ride this afternoon, will you, Anne? I'll not change for luncheon. What's the use, here in the wilds?' It was Josephine who spoke.

'Very good, madame.' Now Anne's tone was approving. 'And, about luncheon. Sarah wants to know.' Of course: Sarah was the housekeeper here. 'She had planned it formal, in the dining-room, expecting Mr. Hyde; but now . . .'

'Yes.' Juliet's glance flickered across the hall to the door towards the back of the house that led into the formal dining-room. 'Under the circumstances, I think a tray in the parlour, Anne.'

* * *

Miss Abigail ate a fragrant of cold chicken, took a sip of the delicious lemonade Sarah had sent up, and looked wistfully out through the verandah. 'Tonight, you said?'

'Or tomorrow.' Juliet repeated it patiently, and took another hungry bite of cold meat and home-made pickle. 'I doubt he'll get here tonight now.' Luncheon had been a long time coming, and the light had faded while they ate. She had given up all hope of a ride and had almost thought of ringing for candles. 'Some coffee, Aunt Abigail?'

'Thank you, my dear.' The white hand shook as it took the exquisite, gilded Meissen cup. 'I could have sworn I heard something. Yes!' She was on her feet. 'He *said* he would come!'

Following her out on to the stoop, Juliet saw that she was right; the carriage had just come into view at the far end of that astonishing avenue of ilexes. But how slowly it moved.

'The horses must be tired.' Miss Abigail had noticed too. She clapped her hands sharply, and old Aaron, the butler, appeared at once, as if on cue, from a door at the side of the wide main

flight of steps. 'Why were we not told that the master was coming, Aaron?' Her voice held chill reproof.

'Miss! Ma'am!' He was shaking all over, his face a curious grey. 'He said not to. He said get him to bed fust, and tell you after.'

For a moment it seemed to Juliet that he was looking at her with hatred. Absurd. 'To bed?' she asked. 'He's ill?'

'He's wounded.' No question about the hate in the old man's eyes now. 'He's fought a duel. Master Hyde that despises such. And been wounded too. Mr. Fonseca's dead, o' course.' His glittering eye held Juliet's for a long moment.

'Wounded?' Abigail swayed where she stood. 'Badly?'

'The Lord He knows. They had no doctor. He would come here, they say. I sent Jim off hell-for-leather for Judge James the minute I heard. At this rate, he won't be long after the master. If he's home.'

Even though she knew herself innocent, Juliet quailed before the hatred in the old man's eyes. Besides, was she innocent? Was not this duel the direct result of her impersonation? Josephine would have known how to handle Fonseca. If Hyde Purchis died, she would have killed him, as surely as if she had fired the pistol.

No time now for thoughts like these. 'Aaron!' She met the furious old eyes squarely. 'Is all ready for the master? His bed? Hot water? Dressings?'

'He din't say nothing 'bout them, ma'am. Just to send the carriage, quick and tell no one, account of he was wounded.'

'And you've done nothing?' Now Juliet was angry. 'Fetch me Sarah this instant. They'll be here in five minutes, and nothing ready! Oh my God!' She turned from her eager, anxious watching of the crawling carriage in time to catch Miss Abigail as she fell.

Now, at last, a crowd of anxious servants appeared. Doubtless they had been waiting until Aaron had broken the bad news. 'Sarah!' Mercifully, the housekeeper was unmistakable in

her scarlet turban and brilliant blue calico gown. 'Miss Abigail's fainted. Have two of the girls take her to her room. Tell them to put all the water on they can to boil in the kitchen. You don't know how bad it is?' His back to Aaron as Sarah disappeared.

'Bad, I think. See how that carriage crawls.'

It was all too convincing. 'Then we won't try to get him upstairs. A bed in his study! Quick! Anne, you see to it.' Thank God Anne had appeared at last. What else was there? Dressings. 'Alice!' The girl had come out on to the steps behind Anne. 'Fetch clean linen, basilicum powder — '

'Clean linen? You mean the master's shirts?'

'No!' Idle to lose her temper; she was almost used, by now, to the way one had to spell everything out. 'Clean sheets, girl, from the linen cupboard, and we'll tear them up as we need them.'

'The best linen?'

'Of course!' Now she actually stamped her foot. 'And quickly! Don't you see the carriage is almost here? We'll take him in the side way, Aaron, to save him these steps. Have a couple of men ready with a chair in case he must be carried.'

'He must, ma'am. He said so. The other gentleman.'

'Then for God's sake get ready.' The carriage was swinging very slowly, very carefully round the curve of the sweep, old Charon handling his horses as if with velvet gloves. It stopped at last, and Juliet was first at the door. 'How is he?' She found herself addressing a total stranger, a tall, fair young man who would have been good-looking were he not so obviously distraught.

'Bad, I'm afraid. And all my fault. You're Mrs. Purchis? I don't know what to say to you — '

'Then say nothing, sir, and help us get him out of the carriage. Where is it?'

'In the shoulder. He fired upward. The other man. From the ground. It was my *fault*, I tell you. I forgot the count.'

'Never mind that now.' Quellingly. 'If it's the shoulder, can he walk?' She did not like the look of the still figure, supported between the stranger and Hyde's own man, Francis.

'Yes.' It was the thread of a voice from Hyde. And, 'No,' said the stranger. 'Not possibly. If you knew how much blood he'd lost, Mrs.Purchis, you'd not chance it.'

'No.' She gave her orders quickly and concisely. 'Not you sir.' The stranger was shaking too much to help carry the chair Aaron had brought out. 'The men will do it better. Gently, now.'

Hyde was white as death. 'I don't know that we ought to move him, ma'am.' Francis spoke from the far side of the carriage.

'Nonsense!' Please God she was right. 'He can't stay here, in the cold. You and Aaron get him out, and into the chair. There's a bed made up in his study.'

'I'm so sorry, my dear.' Hyde's exhausted voice again. 'What a damnable nuisance for you. You've sent for ...' the voice dwindled ... died, then picked up again ... 'Judge James?'

'Yes.' The men had him out of the coach now and into the chair she had had brought out. The rough bandage round his left shoulder was stained scarlet. Heart's blood? Lifeblood? 'But, surely, a doctor?'

'Stupid.' Could there be the faintest hint of laughter in that whisper. 'Will you never remember that Judge James *is* a doctor?'

She nearly said, 'Thank God,' but restrained herself in time, and watched in anxious silence as Aaron and Francis carried Hyde in at the side entrance and round to his study, which was on the right-hand wing of the house, and mercifully, on ground level. The bed was actually ready and Hyde gave a little grunt of relief as the two men lowered him gently on to it. He must have fought in his shirt sleeves, so at least there was no top coat to cut away, but Juliet did not like the look of that widening

patch of scarlet on what struck her as a very inefficient bandage.

'We had nothing,' the stranger had followed them into the room and must have understood her look.

'I see.' No time for him now. She turned to Satan. 'How long till Judge James gets here?'

'Ma'am, I dunno. The Judge might be in circuit; he might be in Savanny; he might be anywhere.'

'I see,' she said again, and looked about her. Frightened faces, stupid faces, useless faces. 'Aaron,' she made up her mind. 'Take this gentleman to a guest-room. Get him everything he needs. The rest of you, get back to your duties.' Ironic word. 'All but Anne and Alice. You've got the dressings, Alice?'

'Yes, ma'am.' The girl looked terrified.

'And the hot water?'

'Sarah's just bringing it.'

'Then you and I will change his bandage, Anne.'

* * *

'My congratulations, ma'am.' Judge James joined Juliet in the parlour an hour or so later. 'I had not thought you so skilled a nurse. If you'd not changed that bandage, you'd be a widow now.'

'And as it is?'

'There's a chance. A good one, I hope. The ball passed upwards, through the shoulder. A clean wound of entry — and of exit too, thank God. No need to maul him about any more now. We must just hope his strong constitution will pull him through. And your nursing, of course.' Was there a touch of surprise in his voice?

'Of course.' Juliet managed an artistic shudder. 'I had practice enough, Judge, after Waterloo.'

'Oh . . .' She had explained what was puzzling him. 'Stupid of me. I cry you a thousand pardons, ma'am.'

'No need. It is not an experience I wish to remember. And your other patient?'

'Miss Abigail? As well as could be expected at her age. A few days of quiet; good news of her nephew; and she should be herself again.'

'Thank God for that. But you think there will *be* good news?'

He faced her squarely and, she thought, with dislike. 'I'd be wrong to hold out more than a fifty-fifty hope, Mrs. Purchis. The other man's dead, I understand.' It was a question heavy with overtones. What in the world would Josephine's reaction be?

She thought of what seeemed a safe one. 'There'll be no trouble? For Hyde?'

'I doubt it. You know — everyone knows how I feel about duelling. I thought your husband shared my views.' No question now about the dislike in his voice. 'But at least he had the grace to fight on the Carolina side of the river. It's no affair of mine. Except as his friend,' (the slightest possible accent on the word 'his') 'and his doctor.' He was writing busily. 'Have these fetched from Savannah at once. Here are the directions. Quiet is most important of all, of course. I shall come over again first thing in the morning.' He was on his feet.

'You'll take something before you go?'

'No.' His look told her more clearly than words how little he liked the idea of drinking with her. 'Thank you,' he added, natural courtesy prevailing over dislike. 'You'll send at once, of course, if he shows signs of fever. I'll take one more look at him before I go.'

He could not prevent her from accompanying him, though she was sure he would have liked to. Hyde was heavily asleep. 'I gave him a laudanum draft,' said Judge James. 'With luck, it should keep him quiet until morning. The less he moves, the better. Someone should sit up with him, of course.'

'Of course.' She would not tell him that she herself intended to do so.

He had only just gone when a new problem presented itself. Alice came tapping at the study door. 'Yes?' Juliet looked up from her seat by the bed. 'Quietly.' She whispered.

'It's the gentleman, ma'am. That came with the master. Fit to be tied, he is; want to know what the Judge said. Keeps allowing it was all his blame.'

'Oh, fiddlestick! Very well. Fetch Anne to sit with the master and tell — ' she did not know the stranger's name — 'tell him I'll see him in the parlour.'

She could not help but be sorry for the distracted young man she found there. 'Sam Everett, ma'am.' He stopped his anxious pacing of the room when she appeared. 'I don't know what to say; how to ask your pardon . . .'

'No need, Mr. Everett.' At least she had had a little time to work out her approach. Even in the distraction of their arrival, she had recognised the New England twang and seen that none of the servants knew him. 'You cannot possibly feel any more guilty than I do. You're a stranger here, but I promise you, when you go into Savannah, you will find enough tongues to tell you that this business is all my fault. And so it is!' It was an immense relief to come out with it. 'Mr. Fonseca was — ' she hesitated — 'An admirer of mine. I never thought . . . never imagined . . . I'm a stranger here too,' she raised huge, distraught eyes to his, and thought, as she did so, just how true it was. 'I must have misunderstood,' she went on. 'Misled him . . . Oh God, if anything happens to Hyde, I'll never forgive myself.' And that was true, too.

'But what did the doctor say?'

'That there was an even chance. No more. It's probably worse, don't you think? Though why he should try to spare me . . .'

'Why not?'

'Oh, because he thinks it's all my fault, of course. And he's

right. I could see him hating me. I don't blame him.' She was crying now, in great uncontrollable relieving bursts of tears.

'Mrs. Purchis, you mustn't.' He took her arm and drew her to a sofa. 'You're overwrought, and no wonder, but remember, you're the only one here who seems capable of keeping her head. You were magnificent, when we got here.' No mistaking the warm admiration in his voice. 'You must not fail your husband now.'

'No.' She sniffed once, resolutely, and smiled up at him through a mist of tears. 'Thank you, Mr. Everett. I needed that. And — ' belatedly, she remembered her position — 'welcome to Winchelsea.'

'To think of arriving thus! Hyde and I talked of it so often, all those years ago, at Harvard. And now, this!'

Thank God she had been right in judging him a complete stranger. 'You must not mind it,' she said mechanically. 'If it had not been you, it would have been someone else.'

'Yes.' He had been longing to get it said. 'But don't you see, that's just it! Anyone used to duelling could not have made the unspeakable mistake that I did. If I had only remembered the count . . .'

'Hush!' He had sat down by her on the sofa, and she put a restraining hand on his. 'You must not refine on it so. Mr. Fonseca is — ' she corrected herself ' — was a desperate man. He might well have fired just the same.' It could easily be true, she thought.

'You really think so? Oh, thank you!' His other hand closed over hers. 'Thank you a thousand times.'

'Josephine!' The icy voice made them both look up.

Abigail Purchis stood in the doorway, taller and more gaunt-looking than ever. One frail white claw held her draperies round her, the other steadied her against the newel post. Now she came forward, one shaky step into the room. 'Perhaps you will make your friend known to me?'

'Hyde's friend, aunt.' Almost for the first time, Juliet found

herself genuinely sorry for Josephine. 'This is Mr. Everett from Boston. He acted — '

'As Hyde's second,' the old lady actually interrupted her. 'Do not expect me to thank you, sir? It is not, precisely, my idea of friendship.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

Towards morning, Hyde began to stir restlessly. 'Josephine?' he muttered.

'I'm here.' Juliet put a restraining hand on his good shoulder. 'Lie still, my dear. Judge James says you must keep as quiet as possible.'

'He's been? I'm home?' His gaze wandered vacantly round the room. 'But, Josephine — '

'Not now.' She had no intention of letting him talk about the duel. 'Here.' She had risen and fetched the draft Judge James had prescribed. 'Drink this.'

'But, Fonseca?'

'Dead.'

'That's something.' The draft was beginning to take effect. 'Should apologise . . . Something . . .' He was asleep again.

Judge James was pleased with him. 'If he goes on like this . . . No excitement . . . no disturbance . . . nothing. He may do yet.'

'You didn't think so yesterday?'

'I'm still very far from being sure. But panic never helped anyone.'

'I don't panic.' He had got under her skin at last. And then,

remembering her part. 'Not without an audience worth the trouble.' She was sure the dislike between Judge James and Josephine must be mutual. 'And Miss Abigail?'

'Worse than I had hoped. Something seems to have disturbed her last night. She's in a fever today. You'll need to send to town again for drops for her.'

'Oh, pshaw,' Juliet was well back into her role now. 'She would get sick when I've all this on my hands already.'

'She adores her great-nephew,' the judge rose, looking at her with frank dislike. 'If you'll be advised by me, Mrs. Purchis, you will leave her nursing to Sarah.'

'I certainly shall.' She had seen how her appearance at the old lady's bedside, that morning, had agitated her. No doubt about it, she had put the worst possible construction on that tableau she had chanced on the night before.

Sam Everett volunteered to go into Savannah for the medicine. 'I'll send it out for you, Mrs. Purchis and take myself off your hands. The last thing you want is to be cumbered with a guest at such a time.'

'Nonsense.' That was too brisk for Josephine, but he would not know. She gave him a languishing glance. 'I need you, Mr. Everett. Think of my situation, all alone out here, with two invalids and a parcel of useless servants. Do, please, come back. I know my husband would wish it. And I promise to make the most complete use of you. To begin with, will you see Mr. Updyke for me — my husband's agent — and explain that he will have to see to everything for a while.'

'Of course.' Eagerly. 'Any other commissions, ma'am? Any notes for your friends?'

Here was a pitfall. Which of her friends would Josephine write to? She put a distracted hand to her brow. 'I don't know what to say, Mr. Everett. God knows what scandal broth is brewing about me in town today. You will act the part of a true friend both to Hyde and to me if you will do what you can to stifle it.'

'Yes.' He looked suddenly much younger than Hyde. 'But what shall I say?'

'Oh!' Impatiently. 'Anything to the purpose. You must surely know on what pretext they fought?'

'Some angry words spoken at your party the other night.'

'Of course. I remember them. Well, there's your cue. And a moving picture of me, if you please, acting the devoted nurse.'

'But you are.'

'Of course I am. What in the world else can I do, so circumstanced? And for God's sake, Mr Everett, let none of my dear friends decide to come and pay me calls of condolence. Tell them what you will, but keep them away.'

'I'll do my best.' Doubtfully. 'Though how any friend of yours *could* stay away at such a time . . . And by the way, which ladies do you wish me to visit on your behalf?'

Here it was again. Fatal to give him the wrong names. She pulled a handkerchief out of her sleeve and put it to her eyes. 'Mr. Everett, I'm distracted with anxiety for my husband! And his aunt! I've had no sleep!' She was actually beginning to feel sorry for herself. 'And we need that medicine! Go to Mrs. Scarbrough.' Here was inspiration. 'Give her my fondest love; tell her all; beg her to make my excuses to my other friends. Tell her you will bring news to town daily of how my invalids go on. I know how anxious his friends will be for Hyde.'

'Yes,' he said with a kind of triumphant obstinacy. 'And so they are bound to call and inquire after him.'

She stamped her foot. ' I won't have them! Have I not enough on my hands as it is? I tell you, Mr. Everett, if you let them come, I shall make you see them for me.'

'But, ma'am . . .'

'Don't stand there saying "But, ma'am," to me. Get to Savannah, Mr. Everett; use your wits; tell Mrs. Scarbrough Miss Abigail has a putrid fever. That will keep them away.'

It did. An oddly peaceful week followed, with Juliet dividing

her time between nursing Hyde and finding her way, quietly, round the house and grounds. Showing Sam Everett about in the evenings was a useful pretext for this. He went into Savannah every morning and brought her back, in the evening, what she suspected of being heavily expurgated accounts of the inevitable scandal. Judge James, paying his daily visit the Thursday after the duel, actually accepted a glass of madeira.

'What's this about a putrid fever?' His quizzical eyes met hers.

'Oh, pshaw,' she made big eyes at him. 'I had to keep my dear, inquisitive friends away somehow. You don't mind, do you, Judge? I've enough on my hands without all the world coming to watch me act the nurse.'

'And very well you do it, Mrs. Purchis.' The compliment seemed to surprise him almost as much as it did her. 'A few more days,' he went on, 'and I think we will be able to pronounce our patient out of danger.'

'And Miss Abigail?'

'Oh.' He hesitated. 'She's getting stronger every day. I think she just feels like keeping to her room for a while.'

'I see.' She made an eloquent little face. 'We must just hope, Judge, that my husband goes on well enough so I can take him back to town soon, before Miss Abigail is permanently bedridden from avoiding me.'

He looked at her soberly. 'It would not be right, Mrs. Purchis, to let you hope for anything of the kind. Your husband won't be fit for town this side of February.'

'February? He'll be ill till then? And need nursing?'

'Well, of course.' His impatient tone told her that he thought her weary already of her role as nurse. 'I am afraid you must resign yourself to the quietest possible Christmas.'

'Oh, Christmas! Who cares about that?' And then, belatedly, remembering, 'It's dull as ditchwater here anyway. I'll be glad to be excused.'

Only after he had gone did she face the real cause of her

anxiety. Hyde would need nursing, careful nursing, for weeks to come. And any minute now she expected to hear from Josephine.

* * *

The summons came a few days later, an impatient scrawl written from the house beyond Ruffton. 'What am I to do, Anne?' Juliet turned to her only confidante.

'You'll have to write and explain. With the master ill, you can't possibly be gone so long as it would take to get up there and back. Satan and the men can fetch her to the old wharf on the far side of the island. In the afternoon, when Mr. Hyde's asleep and Mr. Everett's in town.'

'Yes.' Doubtfully. 'I suppose that would do. But, Anne: Hyde — the nursing . . .'

'Don't you trouble yourself about that, *petite*, I'll take care of him. You know as well as I do that Madame Josephine would never have done what you have. Lucky you've had the sense to keep her friends away. And that's another thing: she's all kinds of plans for Christmas. You couldn't possibly manage that.'

'No . . . No, of course not.' And then, 'You mean, she'll go into Savannah and leave him here ill?'

'But naturally. And a good thing too. I can get on with looking after the master, and Miss Abigail can come downstairs again.' A sharp glance for Juliet. 'You'd best warn your cousin about her — and about Mr. Everett.'

Juliet sighed. 'I've made nothing but trouble. It's time I was gone.' And yet, how loath she was to leave.

* * *

'Well,' Josephine summed it up impatiently. 'A proper muddle you've made of things, and no mistake. Hyde wounded,

a stranger I've never seen in my life installed as a house guest, old Abigail in a miff . . . Have you any other pleasant surprises for me?' They were rapidly changing clothes in the tumble-down house by the old wharf. 'Petticoats and all I suppose,' she said crossly 'Alice would be bound to notice.'

'I'm afraid so.' Juliet handed over hers and stood, shivering in the damp room, while Josephine fumbled with a knotted ribbon. 'Jo,' she went on, 'you do realise, don't you, just how ill Hyde is?'

'I should by now. If you've told me once, you've told me five times! Bed until February; constant care; old Judge James every day! Aren't I just the lucky one! And the devil of it is, if he should die, the estate goes to that nephew of his in Charleston, with old Abigail as tenant for life. And then where's my base of operations!'

'How can you be so heartless!'

'Heartless! You're a fine one to talk. Who got us into this fix, I'd like to know?'

'If you'd only told me about Mr. Fonseca — '

'Why should I? He was safe in Florida, I thought.' The ribbon broke in her hands, and she threw the petticoat at Juliet. 'So long as I live, I'll never forgive you for that, Ju. The only man — ' She stopped. 'The only entertaining man in Savannah, and you get him killed.'

'That's enough.' Juliet's hands were shaking so that she could hardly dress herself. 'I knew, all along, that I should never have agreed to this imposture. You're right: it's caused nothing but trouble. So here's an end of it. If you'll give me the money for my passage back to France, I'll be grateful. If not, I must just manage as best I may.'

'But, Ju!' Josephine's horrified face emerged from her gown. 'You can't fail me now! I've got the ship; she's to be in Charleston some time after Christmas. For fitting out. I'll have to go then.'

'I can't help it.' Every instinct told her that this was what she

must do. The less she wanted to, the more essential it was. She really ought, she thought wryly, to be grateful to Josephine for forcing the decision she had been fighting. 'You'll just have to think of some excuse for going to Charleston. There are always the races. I'm sorry, Jo, it's finished. Only — you will take care of Hyde, won't you? He's so weak still — and all my fault.' She was close to tears.

'Well, I'll be jiggered!' Josephine shook her curls into place. 'You've never lost your head to that dry-as-dust husband of mine! Oh, Ju, what a little fool you are. And what a pity,' she added thoughtfully. 'You'd suit him much better than I do. The two of you could talk education and politics and the rights of man till the cotton was picked. Oh, well,' she gave her pretty little Gallic shrug, 'time's running on. I must get back to the delightful household you have arranged for me, and you to that gothic ruin of yours. You'll find old Sukey has put it in some kind of order for you. As to your passage to France; think it over, child, think it over. For one thing I can't possibly lay my hands on the money for the moment, having spent my last penny on the *Liberty*. My ship,' she explained, 'a suitable name, is it not? Keep calm, love, don't go fretting yourself about Hyde. He'll come about, you see if he doesn't. And I'll visit you from Savannah just as soon as I get fixed there for Christmas. Time then to think of your plans. And one thing, pet. Do pray, remember, if Hyde is really so ill as you say, how bad it must be for him to have this little trick of ours exposed. "No excitement", you keep saying. Well, do you not think it might excite him just a trifle to learn what a fool we have made of him between us? So, for all our sakes, keep quiet, child, in that quiet house of yours. I'll visit you as soon as I can — after Christmas.'

'Very well.' She was too tired to argue. 'I'll wait a while. And keep quiet, as you say.' The light was beginning to fail. Hyde would wake soon, expecting the broth she always gave him now. 'But don't think I shall change my mind, Jo,' she warned,

'for I shan't. Oh, by the way, I helped myself to a bundle of books from the library, to help pass the time. I'll return them when you come.'

Josephine laughed. 'You know how little I shall miss them. And it doesn't sound as if Hyde will be resuming his studies for some time to come. Good-bye, pet, and take care of yourself. I'll go first. No need for more of them than must to see the two of us together.'

'But, Jo—' She was gone. Watching through the broken window, Juliet saw her say a casual word to Noah, the groom, who had been waiting with the horse she had ridden across the island. Then she was up, and riding away down the track across the cotton fields, with never a backward glance.

Juliet bit her lips. So many things she should have said. Too late now. And no time either to be thinking of the cruel, casual things Josephine had said. Or how true they were. She picked up the warm shawl her cousin had been wearing and had a moment's sick revulsion at the too-familiar scent that clung to it. Then, swinging it round her shoulders, she pushed open the crazy door and walked down to the wharf where Satan and his team of rowers were waiting.

* * *

Old Sukey was delighted to see her. 'Gives you the horrors, here on your lone. But you look tuckered out, missy. Why not get right into bed and I'll bring you a bite there?'

It was a delicious idea. Tucked snugly into the bed Sukey had warmed with a hot brick, Juliet had time to notice the 'Some kind of order' Josephine had spoken of. The whole place had been changed beyond recognition. The bed was comfortable, the furniture adequate and the hot meal Sukey brought her delicious. And she was tired, almost too tired to eat. How many nights was it that she had either watched with Hyde, or got up half-way through to make sure all was well with him?

Trying to count, trying not to remember, she let the easy tears trickle down, and fell asleep.

That was the oddest Christmas Juliet ever spent. The weather was mild, like spring-time in France, and she sat out of doors a good deal, warmly wrapped in a shawl, reading and resting after the strain of what she had been through. She and Josephine had agreed, from the start, that it would be best for her not to go far from the house. Sukey did the shopping in Ruffton, as Anne had done before, except that old Sukey grumbled a good deal about the length of the walk, and never got back without reminding Juliet of the state of her 'poor feet'..

She also brought lurid details of the 'Purchis Scandal' which had inevitably reached Ruffton by now. 'They make more of it than most,' she explained. 'Along of Mr. Hyde's being such a quiet kind of gentleman. But Miss Josephine, she's riding high over the lot of them. Christmas parties and I don't know what all.'

'She's in Savannah then?'

'Where else?'

'And what do they say about the master?'

Sukey shrugged immense shoulders. 'Who knows? Winchelsea's a long row from Savanny.'

Surely bad news of Hyde would have reached town? And yet, it was with a curious feeling of confirmed expectation that she saw Satan and his team of rowers pull in towards the wharf one gloomy day of early January. Forgetting all about the rowers, she ran down over the bluff to meet Satan. 'What is it?' The fact that Josephine was not with them was bad news in itself.

'Bad news, missy.' His words confirmed her fears. 'The master's worse. Miss Anne sent us for you — and Noah to town by land for the missis. Won't she just be mad at having to come all the way round by road!' The idea obviously gave him pleasure. 'You to wait for her at the old wharf.'

'But why? What for? I don't understand, Satan.'

'Miss Anne said, don't ask why, just come.'

'Very well.' What else could she say? 'I'll get my shawl, and tell Sukey.'

'Don't waste no time, missy. It takes longer to here than to Savanny, even by road. And the mistress don't much like waiting.'

'No.' She ran up to the house, explained as much as she herself understood to Sukey, promised that she would be back before night fell, and was running back over the bluff winding her shawl round her shoulders as she went, before Sukey had really drawn breath for the inevitable protest.

The mild weather had brought, already, the first hints of spring. Along the river banks the drab hues of cane brakes and evergreens were lighted up, here and there, by the first delicate green and soft brown of new shoots. Juliet hardly noticed. Half consciously, she was aware that the rowers were singing a gloomy song today:

'Die on the field of battle,
Die on the field of battle
Glory in my soul.'

Somewhere, not very far off, on the Carolina shore, a forest fire was burning; she could smell it in the fresh wind and see the heavy pall of smoke overhead. They burned for days sometimes, Sukey had told her. But at least, up there, it was no threat to Winchelsea. They were in the main river now and she saw, with relief, that the tide was low. Josephine's carriage would have no difficulty in getting over the corduroy bridge that connected the island of Winchelsea with the main land.

'Die on the field of battle.' Hyde was worse. If he died, now, it would be twice her fault, for causing the trouble in the first place, and for leaving him against her better judgment. And yet, what else could she have done? Oddly, at this point, she

realised that she had made up her mind about something, without even consciously considering it. She had told Sukey that she would be back before nightfall. Well, poor Sukey would have a long wait. Because, whatever Josephine said, whatever happened, she was going back to nurse Hyde.

And then? She pulled her shawl more tightly round her, against the beginning of the sea breeze. The future must take care of itself. Hyde's illness was her responsibility, and she was going to shoulder it. Her heart curiously lighter at the thought, she shouted back to Satan, 'Tell them to sing the other song; the one about Jenny!'

'Yes, ma'am.' Odd to think he had no idea what her name was.

So it was to the rousing tune of 'Jenny shake her toe at me,' that the boat finally pulled into the old wharf. Anne was standing there, waiting, her face drawn and anxious in the gathering dusk.

'But who's with Hyde?' Juliet asked as she jumped ashore.

'Alice. I gave him an extra draft. He should be quiet for an hour or so more. Yes, wait, Satan, thank you.' Anne was invariably courteous to the servants. 'Quickly.' She led the way towards the tumble-down house. 'You're the only one who can persuade her. She's in a bad mood, I'm afraid; summoned so suddenly, and with a party on tonight; and, of course, the land journey. Even you'll have trouble.'

'Persuade her to what?' But in her heart she knew.

'That you must come back and nurse the master. He won't mind anyone else. I've done my best, God knows.' She broke suddenly into French, a sure indication of her state of mind. 'Night after night I've sat up with him; given him his broth, just the way you did. Everything. No use. He won't stay still, he shifts the bandage, he works himself into a fever, and talking, all the time talking, *le pauvre*.'

'What about?'

'Josephine.' Anne faced her with it, pausing for a moment in

the derelict garden. 'Make no mistake about that, *petite*. It's her he calls for, but it's not her can save his life. I almost laughed, this morning, when Judge James and madame must be sent for. Much use she is in a sickroom. But that's the way it is, *ma mie*. If he's to be saved, you're the one can do it, and then —'

'I know.' Juliet took Anne's hand impulsively. 'Thank you, Anne, I know. Back to France. I'd told Josephine that already. I hadn't meant to come back, but this is different, is it not?'

'It is indeed. I just hope to God you can persuade her.'

'I shall.' Juliet pushed open the rotten door of the house.

'At last!' Josephine's mood was even worse than Anne had prophesied. Juliet knew those signs of old, the furrowed brow, the angrily twisting hands, the voice almost unrecognisably shrill. 'So!' She was up from her battered chair like a rattlesnake uncoiling. 'You choose to send for me, cousin, and then keep me waiting, in this hole, an hour and more.'

'I'm sorry.' Juliet kept her voice purposefully low. 'But in fact, Jo, it was not I who sent for you, but Doctor James.' She used the judge's other title advisedly.

'James? But why? And why here?'

'That was Anne's doing.' Anne, she noticed, had very wisely decided to stay outside and leave the two of them to it. 'Judge James said Hyde needed your nursing. That you must be sent for. Anne quite rightly reasoned that what he meant (though of course he did not know it) was that he needed *my* nursing. And he's going to get it.'

'I don't believe I quite understand you.' Josephine, too, had lowered her voice, but it was still dangerous.

'No? Then I must make myself clear. This disaster happened because I agreed to your scheme of a substitution. Hyde's illness is entirely my fault, as you have not hesitated to point out to me. Well, then, if there is anything I can do to save his life — and it seems there's a chance of it — I am going to do it. Have it whichever way you like. Sukey is expecting me back

tonight. If you go, I will take over at Winchelsea as before; when Hyde is better — if he is,' she hardly dared say it, 'I will let you know.'

'And if I don't agree?'

'I shall go up to the house, make myself known to Miss Abigail, tell the whole story, and nurse him just the same. You won't like that much.'

'I shall not.' Josephine actually ground her teeth. 'And you won't look very pretty either.'

'No. But don't you see, I don't care. That's where I'm stronger than you, Jo. I don't care about anything except saving Hyde's life, if, please God, I can.'

'And afterwards?' It was Anne's question, rephrased.

'Afterwards, I shall go back to France. You will neither of you ever see me again. That I promise you, Jo.'

'Oh, very well.' Anger suddenly dissolved into pettishness. 'It's deuced inconvenient and means I must miss a whole range of New Year parties, but you shall have your way this time. On one condition.' Her tone hardened suddenly.

'Yes.'

'That you stay and see me through my venture. The *Liberty* and her crew won't be ready until spring. There's more to do than I had realised to prepare for the long voyage to France.' She laughed suddenly, breaking the tension. 'There's one way you could get back, Ju.'

'By way of a mad venture to St. Helena? With a parcel of rapscallions from the Old Guard! I thank you, no.'

'But you will go back?' Anxiously. 'I doubt there won't be room for the two of us in this country, not after this charade is over.'

'Of course I'll go.' Somehow, once again, without anything exactly said, it seemed to have been agreed between them that she would see Josephine through her mad project. Shamefully impossible not to be glad of this.

It was getting dark in the dismal little room. 'Time to be

going.' Josephine was herself again. 'Unbutton me, pet.'

They made the inevitable exchange of clothes in almost total silence, each busy with her own thoughts. 'Oh, well, back to the wilderness.' Josephine was ready first. 'You'll let me know the minute he's better? I can't say I much fancy life out on that bluff of yours, with old Sukey and the alligators for company.'

'I've left some books.'

'Books! Dear God how bored I'm going to be.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

Noah was waiting outside with Ariel. He must be in the plot by now, since Anne had had him meet the carriage at the end of the causeway, to save Josephine the long drive up to the house. As a result, maddeningly, Juliet had to ride back across the island to where Charon was patiently walking the carriage horses up and down. But at least Anne had apparently taken the result of the interview for granted and had already left to walk back to the house. She would be giving Hyde his broth.

'Good to see you, ma'am!' Charon beamed at her as he helped her into the carriage. 'Now we'll be all right and tight again.'

Leaning back against the musty squabs, Juliet wondered just how many of the servants actually knew of the substitution. Had she given herself away more than she knew? She did not think so, for after all neither Hyde nor old Miss Abigail had shown the slightest suspicion. Much more likely that Josephine's bribing of Satan and the rowers had been less efficacious than she thought. After all, they might take their

mistress's money, but it was their master they loved. At least, she thought, so long as the servants seemed to be in a kind of tacit conspiracy to help her, it should make things much easier.

It was good, too, to find Alice waiting for her when she hurried up to her room after a quick glance in at the sickroom door to see Hyde fast asleep and Anne beside him, finger on lips.

'Thank God you're come, ma'am.' Alice took her shawl. 'The judge is waiting for you in the parlour. I told Pete to shut the door tight so you could get up here first.' And then, suddenly anxious. 'It *is* you, ma'am, isn't it?'

Juliet could not help laughing. So much for their well-kept secret. 'Yes, it's I, Alice. I've come to nurse the master.'

'Of course.' Alice clearly saw nothing out of the way in this. 'And Miss Abigail?'

'Has she been downstairs?'

'Constantly. While you — while the mistress has been away.' She was busy combing out Juliet's tangled curls. 'She took to her bed again when Judge James said to send for you — for her.' She grinned delightedly. 'A real Christmas charade it is, and no mistake. And don't ever forget, ma'am, we're all on your side, every mortal soul of us.'

'Everyone knows?'

'Well of course.' She laughed again. 'That Satan's never kept counsel in his life. It's just like the mistress not to know that.'

'But you've not told?'

'The family? I should just about think not. It would kill the master, the state he's in, and very likely Miss Abigail too. We'd never hurt them, don't you see, miss,' she hesitated, 'ma'am?'

'Best call me ma'am to be on the safe side. But how does it come about that you are here. You didn't come back from Savannah with the mistress?'

'Nor went there with her neither. No ma'am. She chose to take Kate to town with her. Well,' fairly, 'I reckon she's not

fool enough that she didn't feel something when she came back. Seems like I couldn't serve her just the way I can you. And that Kate, she's as stupid as she can hold together. I doubt she even knows.'

'Well, that's something,' said Juliet ruefully. 'Oh — and Mr. Everett?'

'He left soon after you did, ma'am. Said he must see to his business in Savannah. And he's not staying in Oglethorpe Square neither. Took his traps out pretty smartly and moved to the Pulaski Hotel. He sends all the time to enquire, you understand, and rides out once or twice a week. There! You're tidy enough for the Judge. And don't be worrying that he might notice anything. He dislikes the mistress so much he never looks at her, Aaron says. I think it went against the grain with him to send for her back (you back!) but I tell you straight, ma'am, we were going to, tomorrow, if he hadn't.'

'You?'

'Yes. All of us. We talked it over down at the cottages last night and agreed we'd give it one more day. Then Satan was coming up to Ruffton, orders or no orders, to tell you how things were, and ask you to come back. We love the master, don't you see?'

'Yes, Alice, I do.' She was close to tears. 'Will I pass?' She made herself sound calm.

'With a bit of a bad temper at being dragged away from I don't know how many balls; and your fan — ' Alice handed it to her. 'Yes. And God bless you, ma'am, whoever you are.'

Heart-warming to have so many allies all of a sudden. Juliet went downstairs with a firm step and found Sam loitering in the hall, ready to throw open the parlour door for her. 'Just a minute, Sam.' He, too, was grinning at her as if to show every gleaming tooth in his head. 'I want to look in on the master first.'

But Hyde was still asleep, Anne still fixed by his bedside; there was no excuse for loitering here. And no pleasure, either.

Now she was calmer, she could see a grave change in Hyde. His face was thinner; his eyes huge and dark-shadowed; even in sleep his hands moved restlessly over the bedclothes. 'I'll be back,' she whispered to Anne, then hurried down the hall to join the doctor.

'At last, ma'am.' He was a formidable figure, more judge than doctor. 'You have actually torn yourself away from your festivities?'

'At your command, Judge.' She must not let the comfortable frankness with Alice make her forget her part. 'And am missing a Twelfth Night party at Mrs. Scarbrough's as a result. I trust what you have to tell me will justfy the sacrifice.'

'What I have to tell you, ma'am.' He stood over her, black in his formal clothes, as she reclined negligently in a chair, and his very whiskers seemed to bristle with anger. 'What I have to tell you,' he repeated in a slightly calmer tone, and with a visible effort, 'is that, thanks to your neglect — parties at Mrs. Scarbrough's forsooth! — your husband is nearer to death now than he was when they brought him home.'

'Oh, my God!' But it was only what she herself had thought.

'Yes.' He looked at her very straight under heavy eyebrows. 'I was surprised, madame, I confess, at the way you nursed him in the first place. I was almost led to change the opinion I have held of you, since my friend Hyde brought you home from France . . . But to abandon him to servants, just when he had taken a turn, when he was on the mend, when every day, every minute counted . . . I don't know how you can reconcile it with your conscience.'

'Oh God, nor do I.' It came, uncontrollably, from her heart. And then, with an effort. 'But you must not forget my other responsibilities — my friends in Savannah — Christmas — the New Year.'

'Christmas!' he said. 'New Year! Friends! Pah — ' He spat it out. 'I tell you, ma'am, if you let Hyde Purchis die of neglect,

you won't find you have many friends here in Chatham County. Had you thought of that, hey? Or what will become of you if he dies? His nephew's no friend of yours: Miss Abigail won't see you. It will be back to France for you, bag and baggage, and don't deceive yourself otherwise.'

'I know, Doctor.' She kept her voice sweet as honey. 'And that is precisely why I am here. So let us sit down, quietly together, like the friends we are not, while you tell me what I must do to keep this husband of mine alive.'

'Think of nothing else,' he began uncompromisingly, and went on to a list of jalaps, tinctures and febrifuges that made her head whirl. 'And if that does not serve,' he concluded. 'We must try a blister.'

'Oh, no!' This drastic and hazardous treatment had been tried on her father, with disastrous effects. The artificially induced blister had driven him nearly mad with pain. Alone in the house with him, she had been afraid for both their lives.

'I'm the doctor.' But the judge's tone had softened just a shade. 'Don't you see, Mrs. Purchis, what we have to do is bring him to his senses, get him fighting on our side. Right now, he's just letting himself go. We've got to change that, or, frankly, there's not a hope. There are illnesses of the mind, as well as of the body. I think he is suffering from both, and the one is aggravating the other.'

Oh, poor Hyde, pining for a wife who would not sacrifice a few parties to nurse him. 'Very well, Doctor.' She rose gracefully to her feet and held out a hand that was not quite as white as it should be, owing to all that sitting out of doors at Ruffton. 'I will do my best, such as it is. Though why anyone should think me fit for a mental nurse, God knows.'

'God knows indeed!' She had made him angry, as she intended. 'I certainly do not. And moreover, ma'am, I said nothing about madness, which you seem to imply. I merely believe that my poor friend is suffering from a melancholic

affliction of the nerves. Cheer him, ma'am; read to him; talk to him, even if he don't seem to listen.'

She yawned, prettily, behind her hand. 'Forgive me, Judge — So late last night. Read to him, you say? Books?'

'You know how, I take it?' His tone was scathing.

'Why yes. They said at the Convent that I could make even Abbé Millot's *History* interesting. But what in the world am I to read, Judge?'

'Anything that Hyde enjoys.' A very grim look under those bushy eyebrows. 'You don't know? Well, he was reading Gibbon before Christmas. You might contrive to find that in the library, if you looked.'

'Gibbon! All about those detestable Romans with the unpronounceable names?' Would Josephine know that much? 'You must be joking me, Judge. It would kill him outright. And me, too, for the matter of that, and I suppose, for the moment, you would rather have me alive. And that reminds me, there's something you can do for me, if you will.'

'At your service, of course.' His tone belied the words.

'It's Miss Abigail. I expect you know she took a miff against me when I was here last. Quite ridiculous. She found poor Mr. Everett sitting by me on the sofa and jumped to all kinds of old maid's conclusions. She's been avoiding me ever since. Frankly, I find it too tedious to be endured. I don't care what you say to her, Judge, but if I'm going to nurse Hyde, she must come downstairs and behave like a civilised person.' She laughed harshly. 'I'm prepared to face scandal for someone like poor Mr. Fonseca, but Mr. Everett! I thank you, no. Tell Miss Abigail she's got cotton-seed in her head, would you, and make her behave?'

'Miss Abigail is a Purchis.'

'And therefore above manners? I'm a Purchis too, Judge, of a sort, and I won't be treated like white trash in my own house.' She pulled the bell-rope. 'Sam.' He must have been waiting outside the door. 'Ask Miss Abigail if she will see the doctor?

And now, if you will excuse me, Judge, I should be with my patient. What did you say? Talking to him? Reading to him? Oh, delicious!' She swept from the room.

In the sickroom, nothing had changed. Hyde lay, just as he had before, flat on his back, arms loose on the quilt, jaw slightly dropped, a picture of inertia. Beside him, Anne was working steadily at the tatting that had been her solace ever since Juliet could remember. She rose, now, with a look of relief. 'You're here, at last. I was beginning to think you'd never come. It's time for his medicine, and he won't take it for me.'

'What is it? It smells very nasty.' Juliet sniffed at it gingerly.

'Red pepper tea. They call it "Old Doctor Capsicum," the good God knows why.'

Juliet bent over the bed and took one of those limp hands in hers. 'Hyde!' she said urgently. 'Hyde, wake up. It's time for your medicine.'

No response. 'Hyde!' Louder this time, and close to his ear. 'It's I, Josephine. I'm home. And it's time for your medicine.'

Not a movement from the still figure on the bed. 'How long has he been like this?' Juliet turned to Anne.

'It's been getting steadily worse. As bad as this? Two days? Three? Hard to tell, exactly. For a while, he did as he was told, drank his medicine, let us move him in the bed, change his linen, that kind of thing. Now – nothing.'

'You should have sent for me sooner.' But what use was that? 'Go, quick, Anne. Judge James should still be with Miss Abigail. Ask him to come here to me before he goes.' She sat down in Anne's chair by the bed and began, first gently, then harder to rub the hand that lay on the quilt beside her. 'Hyde,' she said, and then, louder, 'Hyde?'

It was like talking to a thing, a stone, a tree. Her voice rose, despite her, reaching almost a note of hysteria. 'Hyde! I'm here, Josephine. Look at me! Speak to me!'

Did the still figure on the bed stir just a little, or was she imagining it? If it did, it was only for an instant. The jaw that might have closed, just a fraction, was open again, the mouth-breathing heavy and laboured as ever. And she had done this. All of it. She sat there, the lifeless hand in hers, tears pouring down on it.

'Mrs. Purchis!' Judge James's surprised voice roused her. Stupid! She should not have let him catch her like this.

'Doctor! There you are at last. I vow I was near to tears with pure boredom. I ask you, what is the use of my talking, reading aloud, doing anything for this! This thing! You were right and I was wrong. We must try the blister.'

'We?'

'I am his wife, Doctor, like it or not. And his nurse. Thanks to you. As both, I think he has been allowed to continue in this lethargy too long. If you can think of a better way than a blister to rouse him, pray do. For me, I find myself at a stand. Only — it may make him violent.' She could not tell him what her father had been like. 'What might that not do to the wound?'

'Oh, the wound.' His tone was quelling. 'That is healing; that's no great problem.'

'Well, thank God for that,' she rose to face him. 'You might have told me sooner, Doctor.'

'If you had been here sooner, I would no doubt have done so.'

'I see.' She must not actually quarrel with him. 'Have you the cantharides here, Doctor? For the blister?'

'Naturally, since I have had this treatment in mind for some days.'

'And where will you apply it?'

'On the other shoulder. You do understand, Mrs. Purchis, that there is no precise medical reason for this treatment? It is merely my own idea. You seem to know how violent the effects of cantharides can be. You perhaps understand what I have in

mind? Without being aware of it, he was beginning to talk to her like a reasonable being.

'I think I do. The pain of the blister will rouse him.'

'Precisely. But not for some time. You know, perhaps, that cantharides, or Spanish fly, takes some hours to work, when applied externally, like this. So we have a question. If I apply it now, it should begin to take effect somewhere round midnight. Not perhaps the ideal moment to have him violent on your hands?'

'And how much risk do you think there is in delay?'

'Impossible to tell. But, I tell you frankly, I don't like this state of his.'

'And no more do I. Very well, proceed at once, Doctor. I will see to it that I have the best of the men ready, in case he should be violent. They all love him you know.'

'Yes.' He was already delving in his black bag. 'I wish I could stay with you, Mrs. Purchis, but I have to be at the other end of the county tomorrow. Frankly, I can only say I hope he does prove violent.'

She met his sad glance squarely. 'So do I.'

* * *

At Anne's suggestion, Juliet rested a while after supper. 'I'll let you know if there's the slightest change.' But there had been none when Juliet joined her in the sickroom towards eleven o'clock. 'It's hard to tell whether he's asleep or awake.' Without noticing it, they had both given up whispering.

'Yes. Get some sleep now, Anne. Satan and Aaron are out in the hall in case I need them.'

'And the boys too, I'm glad to see.'

'Yes, just so long as he doesn't reopen the wound.'

'The doctor seemed sure enough. He has a splendid constitution, Monsieur Hyde; that's why this is all so strange.'

'I know.' But she would not discuss, even with Anne, the

effect that marriage with her cousin might have had on even the strongest constitution. 'Rest well, Anne, you looked exhausted.'

'If you promise to send for me — '

'Of course.'

It was good to have him to herself, even lying there so still. She trimmed the lamp and moved it to a table further from the bed. Her father had knocked over everything within reach. But then she had been alone with him. Tonight she had help at hand. And Hyde — was Hyde. She bent forward to look at him more closely. Beads of sweat were breaking out on his forehead. It had started. Now he began to move, writhing, as if to get away from the agonising pain in his left shoulder. She caught that hand in both hers. 'Hyde! Don't! It's a blister: to help you.'

His eyes suddenly opened, huge and dark in the gaunt face. 'Devil!' he said. And then, 'Josephine?' He was actually trying to turn his head to look at her, the pain apparently forgotten.

'I'm here. Try to keep still.' The writhing had begun again and she felt sweat break out on her own forehead in sympathy.

'I can't see you.' He spoke with difficulty, the words spaced out. 'So dark . . . nearer . . . come nearer.'

'It's night.' Did he perhaps think his sight was failing? She bent closely over him and pulled out her handkerchief to mop up the sweat that was now running in rivulets down his face. 'Try to bear it, love.' She suppressed a start as his right hand snatched the handkerchief from her. 'Don't! Your wound!'

But he was quiet again, the handkerchief held against his face. 'Josephine,' he said. 'Stay with me?'

'Of course. So long as you need me.' What a blessing to be alone with him and able to speak freely. Freely? What had she called him just now?

She turned with a start to see Aaron peering anxiously round the door. 'All's well,' she whispered. 'It's worked.'

'Glory be to God.' Aaron came a step forward into the room. 'And him quiet as a lamb, praise be.'

'Get out,' said Hyde Purchis.

* * *

Dawn broke at last and the anxious little group of servants in the hall snuffed guttering candles and blew out smoking lamps. They had all slept a little, though none of them would admit it. Now, the question was, who would venture back into the master's room from which no sound had issued since Aaron had left it.

'Not I,' said Aaron, 'he told me to get out, the master who never said a cross word in his life. You go, Satan.'

'No, sir. Me, an outdoor man in the master's room? I think not.'

'But supposing he's run mad and strangled the mistress?'

' 'Twould be a pity it's the wrong one,' said Aaron, and then. 'Law, Miss Anne, I never saw you come.'

'So I understand,' said Anne tartly. 'Well, speak up, men. What's happened, all night?'

'Nothing,' said Aaron. 'Leastways, when I went in, hours ago, in the dead time of the night, she said it had worked, and he told me to get out. So I got.'

'And no one's been back?'

'You go, Miss Anne.' They said it as one man.

In the sickroom, heavy curtains were drawn against the first daylight; the lamp had burned low and Anne had to trim it before she could see Hyde fast asleep in bed, with Juliet, also deep asleep, on the floor beside him, her hand still held in both of his.

'*Tiens!*' said Anne, and then, aware of the curious group of servants at the door. 'All's well. They're asleep. You, Pete, run tell them to start heating water for a bath for the mistress. She'll be stiff as a post when she wakes. And close the door

behind you.' Juliet was already beginning to stir. Only the good God knew what she would say when she woke.

But Juliet was awake, and smiling up at her. 'It worked, Anne. He knew me.'

'Knew — ' Hyde's voice interrupted her from the bed. 'Josephine,' he said.

Arriving, late in the afternoon, Judge James was at once aware of the different feeling in the house. Pete took his horse with a broad grin and the news that the master was a different man today. Aaron greeted him at the front door with the same news; Miss Abigail came out of the parlour: 'Congratulations on your treatment, Doctor.'

'Not mine.' He was ever a man to give credit where it was due. 'It was Mrs. Purchis who urged it.'

'Well.' He could almost see the old lady bite back the suggestion that Josephine Purchis might not mind giving her husband pain. 'At least it worked, praise be.'

'He's really better?'

'Go and see for yourself.'

Sam, the indoor boy, was waiting to lead him down the side hall to the sickroom door. He paused outside. 'Listen, sir!'

Incredibly, it was Hyde's laugh. Feeble, of course, and cut short suddenly, as if it had caught either the old wound or the new blister, but unmistakably a laugh. Sam opened the door, 'Judge James, ma'am.'

Surprisingly, for him, the Judge's first thought was that Mrs. Purchis looked exhausted, but his quick surge of sympathy died at her greeting. 'Congratulate me, Judge,' she said lightly. 'Our Lazarus has risen. And, please note, we have found something better to read aloud than your Mr. Gibbon and his Roman bores.' She held out a calf-bound volume for his inspection.

'*Tristram Shandy*?' Surprise mingled with disapproval in his voice.

'By someone called Mr. Sterne. I found it among my husband's books. It looked well-read, so I thought, why not?

Frankly,' she made huge eyes at him, 'I don't understand a word of it, though I suspect some of it is vastly shocking, but it seems to entertain Mr. Purchis.'

'Oh, well, in that case . . . But what kind of a night did you have, ma'am?'

She yawned prettily behind a surprisingly brown little hand. 'I'm ashamed to tell you, Doctor, that I hardly know. To tell truth. I slept through most of it. Your mighty crisis was a deal less dramatic than you had led me to expect. Not that I am complaining, you understand, I find drama of all things the most tedious. But you will wish to be examining your patient. I will await you in the parlour.'

CHAPTER NINE

'It will be slow.' Judge James picked up his hat to leave. 'Don't delude yourself, Mrs. Purchis, that your husband will be squiring you to balls again before May at the earliest. Or able to spare you either.' A flashing look from fierce old eyes. 'You do seem to have a remarkable effect on him.' It came out grudgingly.

'Surprises you, don't it, Doctor?' She had seized the chance, while he was examining Hyde, to change into one of Josephine's most frivolous gowns, an exquisite confection of lemon yellow muslin and cherry coloured ribbons, and looked, she flattered herself, every inch the town belle. 'Poor Hyde.' She unfolded her fan delicately. 'Just because he has always behaved like an old sobersides, you all treat him as one. It's gaiety he needs, don't you see? Some pleasure in his life. No, no — ' she fluttered the fan defensively as if he was about to attack her, 'I

do not mean that I propose to take him jauntering off to Savannah. I'm not quite the fool you think me, Doctor. Even I can see that he will need many weeks of quiet before he is fit for work, still less for pleasure. Being Hyde! But because he is to be quiet, I see no reason why he should be dull. Ah,' she smiled brilliantly over her fan at Sam Everett who had just been ushered into the room by Aaron. 'The very person I had hoped to see.'

'I'm flattered beyond words, Mrs. Purchis.' She was amused to see that he also looked rather frightened. What passages between him and Josephine had driven him, neck and crop, from the house in Oglethorpe Square? He turned the subject quickly. 'This is splendid news I hear from the servants, about Hyde.'

She flashed him a roguish smile. 'I might have known I'd not be allowed to break my own good news. Yes, we think he is really on the mend at last, but tell me, quick, that Mrs Scarbrough's party was a dead bore without me.'

'Oh, deplorable.' And then, aware for the first time of Abigail, disapproving in the window recess. 'Your servant, Miss Abigail. I cry your pardon, I quite failed to see you in the shadows there.'

'Didn't expect to, you mean, young man.' There were no compromises about Miss Abigail. 'Well, I'm here, and intend to remain.'

'Which is more than I can,' said Judge James. 'I'll call tomorrow, Mrs. Purchis, and can only hope to find the improvement maintained. I've seldom been more pleasantly surprised in my life.'

'Surprised!' Juliet went into a great peal of laughter as the door closed behind him. 'He's flabbergasted, poor man. That anyone so intelligent as Hyde should find pleasure in being nursed by me. But—' a quick look at Josephine's jewelled watch—'That reminds me, I have been an immense time away from him already. So, to your commission, Mr. Everett. You

are to purhcase for me, if you please, some packs of cards, a bezique set, the smallest chessmen you can find, and a whole shelf full of books.'

'Books?' said Aunt Abigail. 'But the house is full of them, child.'

'Yes. Which nobody ever reads. And no wonder. The judge suggested I try reading Gibbon to poor Hyde. Well,' more delicate play with the fan for Sam Everett's benefit, 'I ask you! Gibbon! He'll be suggesting Sherlock's Sermons next.'

'But what books?' There was something rather touching about Sam Everett's anxiety to please.

'Ah! There's the question.' She took a quick turn about the room, cherry coloured ribbons aflutter. 'Something that I can bear to read aloud and Hyde can stand to hear. Not poetry, that's for certain.' Josephine had never been able to bear it, even in French, while the English, she maintained, was barbarous. 'But novels, Mr. Everett!' She made them sound a delicious vice. 'There must be some novels, even in Savannah.'

'I suppose so.' Doubtfully. 'Is there a bookshop?'

'Oh, Mr. Everett,' she stamped a tiny foot, whose cherry coloured slipper matched her ribbons. 'Sometimes I despair of you. Go to my friends, sir! I have some friends in Savannah, I believe. Beg from them what they have had most recently from England.'

'I have it.' He was delighted with himself. '*Waverley!*'

'*Mon Dieu!*' She did not often allow herself to break into French. 'Do you want us both to go into a decline? And not the *Tales of my Landlord* either. For one thing, can you imagine me interpreting all that bonny braw Scots?' She made a ludicrous attempt at the accent.

'My dear madam, in that case, I just don't know . . .' He was entirely at a nonplus.

And what could she do? Everyone knew Josephine Purchis as someone for whom the word 'book' meant, at the most, *La Belle Assemblée* or one of the other English magazines of

gossip and fashion that found their slow way across the Atlantic. 'You must ask, Mr. Everett!' Impatiently. 'Ask my friends. Explain my position to them. Fixed here, for God knows how long, with an invalid who must be kept amused. Surely, when they hear of the plight I am in, they will think of something.'

'Perhaps I might make a suggestion?' Miss Abigail leaned forward from her chair in the corner. 'There's a favourite author of mine whose works Hyde took a deal of trouble to get for me when he was in Europe. A Miss Austen. She died, I am sorry to say, a few years ago. I get the most constant pleasure from her books, which strike me as being something quite out of the usual way. And I remember poor Hyde telling me he had read one of them, while you were ill, Josephine, on the voyage home. And liked it, I remember his telling me, more than he had expected. Well,' apologetically, 'being by a woman, you know.'

'Quite so.' Juliet could hardly believe her luck. 'And you have all her books, Miss Abigail?'

'Yes. Surely you remember,' her voice sharpened, 'you were not best pleased that Hyde chose to "cumber your baggage" with them.'

'Oh, well,' lightly, 'I must make you my apologies now, must I not, and beg to borrow them to read to him. I am sure I remember hearing, oh a million years ago, in France, that they were favourites of the English Prince Regent himself. I think someone told me one of them was actually dedicated to him, at his own request?'

'And you think that a recommendation?' Abigail's dry voice told her that she had achieved just the effect she intended. 'You are right, however. *Emma* — not one of my favourites — is, in fact, dedicated to the Prince. I cannot imagine what he saw in Miss Austen's books.'

'Not what you do, that's for certain,' said Juliet flippantly. 'But I confess it makes me a little more hopeful of finding some

trace of entertainment in reading them aloud to my poor log of a husband.' And then, aware, with an odd kind of satisfaction, that she had succeeded in shocking them both, she went gaily on. 'To whom, by the way, I must return. He gets quite absurdly restless if I am away too long. Ridiculous, is it not? So, Aunt Abigail, I can rely on you for my reading matter, and on you, Mr. Everett, for some games to play with my great child. Oh —' she turned in the doorway, 'and anything else you can think of [she had nearly added, "if you can think"] — spillikins, fox and geese . . . I am quite counting on you, Mr. Everett.'

* * *

Hyde had indeed been getting restless. 'He's been asking for you.' Anne rose with relief to vacate the chair by the bed.

'For Josephine, you mean.' Absurd to mind this so much. Impossible not to.

'Well, it's the same thing, isn't it?'

'Is it?' The look that went with this question sent Anne off to her bedroom where she fell on her knees in prayer to the good God who had never answered her yet.

But Hyde's recovery continued, slow, steady and satisfactory. Judge James, visiting the big house as often as his legal duties allowed, could hardly make up his mind which surprised him more, the improvement in his patient or that in his wife. They were always busy at something when he got there. At first, Josephine was usually reading aloud out of that curious set of novels Miss Abigail had provided. He failed to see much point in them, himself, but since they seemed to send both Hyde and his wife off into peals of helpless laughter, he concealed his private opinion that they were just a lot of female knick-knackery, and listened with sympathy when Hyde, in his still rather halting voice, explained that they were celebrating the humours of someone called Miss Bates.

In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Purchis had a rather irritating habit of

quoting Miss Austen's works to each other, when he was there, and then going off into fresh fits of laughter. It was a relief to arrive, a couple of weeks later, and find the books put away and cards the order of the day. It was a very simple game, he noticed, and one, surely, that must be vastly tedious to Mrs. Purchis, a devotee, by all reports of faro and ombre and all kinds of more sinister ways of losing money. But she seemed to be enjoying this simple game of beggar-my-neighbour well enough, though, watching from the door, he suspected her of a little quiet cheating against herself.

He also noticed, and was ashamed not to have done so sooner, that she was looking fagged to death. 'When did you last go out, Mrs. Purchis?' he asked abruptly.

'Out! Good God, Doctor, what need to ask? Why, the night before Twelfth Night. Lord — an age ago — and a very dull party too, as I recollect. Now, Mrs. Scarbrough's, next day, was quite something else again, by all reports. I have not lacked kind friends, I can tell you, to let me know what delights I missed. The new house Mr. Jay has built for them in West Broad Street passes everything it seems. Our noses will be quite out of joint when we go back to Oglethorpe Square.'

'No, no, I don't mean "out" in that sense, Mrs. Purchis.' His impulse of sympathy for her jaded looks was lost in a more normal irritation at her incurable frivolity. 'I meant, when were you last out of doors?'

'Oh, I see. Why, this morning. I picked these for Hyde.'

He had noticed the bowl of hyacinths that scented the whole room, but had taken it for granted that the fresh flowers that decorated the room every day were provided by the servants. 'And very pretty too,' he said now, his tone, he himself felt, a trifle grudging. 'And how far from the house did that take you?'

'All the way to the walled garden. Miss Abigail had them planted there years ago and they are thick on the ground now. No trouble at all to pull. And quite far enough for my slippers.'

She extended an elegant little foot, clad in soft blue kid, for his inspection.

'Five minutes, in fact.' The glimpse of ankle had shocked him. 'It's not enough, Mrs. Purchis. I don't want you ill on my hands, too.'

'No,' she smiled up at him very sweetly, 'I'm sure you don't, Doctor.'

'Riding.' Hyde spoke from the bed. 'You should have been riding, Jo.'

She had thought the pet name private between herself and her cousin and his use of it took her more aback than she liked. 'Riding?'

'Of course. Ariel must be eating his heart out in the stables. Ring the bell at once, my dear. We must make sure some of the fidgets have been knocked out of him before you take him out.'

'On the contrary.' She pulled the bell-rope obediently. 'I can think of nothing I should enjoy more than a battle of wills with Ariel. So long as you promise me, Hyde, that you will lie quiet while I am out, and not start your moping.'

'Moping?' Judge James was on to it like a flash. He was too good a doctor to let himself find it deplorable that Hyde Purchis of Winchelsea should let himself get in a mope because of a young female who enjoyed showing off her ankles to comparative strangers. Now, looking, suddenly, from Hyde to his wife, he had an uncomfortable feeling that she had read his thoughts.

'Extraordinary, isn't it, Doctor?' she said. 'He actually misses me.'

'But you're to ride an hour a day just the same,' Hyde spoke in a stronger voice than he had managed since his illness. 'Ah, there you are Aaron. Tell Satan to saddle up Ariel for the mistress, and make sure he is fit to be ridden.'

'He's fit all right, sir,' Aaron beamed impartially at them all. 'Those two young devils Pete and Sam have taken turns to ride

him — being the right weight, give or take a pound or so — so's he'd be ready for the mistress when she wanted him. I'll give the orders right away. And tell Satan to be ready to go 'long.'

'Nothing of the kind.' It was the sort of firm phrase Josephine would never have used, but a quick glance under lowered lashes showed her, Hyde and the judge merely surprised, not in the least suspicious. Only Aaron, she thought, was looking a warning. Absurd situation. She turned a languishing glance on Hyde, 'My dear, you cannot possible expect me to keep my pace down to one of those slugs old Satan rides. You know there's never been a horse yet I couldn't manage.' What a blessing that this was something she and Josephine had in common. 'And I'll promise, cross my heart, not to go off the island. What harm can come to me here, on our own land? No, Judge,' she had seen him about to voice a protest, 'this is between Mr. Purchis and me.'

Hyde was still looking doubtful. 'Just for today, Jo, as a favour to me, would you take old Satan along? It's stupid, I know, but I find I cannot keep myself from worrying, when you are not with me. What you call moping, I suppose.'

'Oh, very well, just for today.' Absurd, but when he called her 'Jo' she felt ready to do anything for him.

It was delicious to be in the saddle again, riding across the island with old Satan grumbling behind. The early southern spring had made great strides while she had been confined in Hyde's sickroom and the whole island had come alive. Butterflies rose in vivid patches from the sweetscented jasmine vines; brilliantly coloured birds flashed past her; a thousand delicious scents made her pause from time to time to ask Satan, 'What's that?' Of course, he never knew, any more than he knew the names of the birds, except the most obvious ones like the glossy blue jay and the disappointingly drab mocking-bird. He was just as hopeless about plants. The orchard of peach trees down below the house was in full fragrant bloom but all this meant to him was, 'Plenty of peach brandy this year.'

Over on the sea side of the island, the wild plum was silver with blossom, and here, too, he had a practical comment. 'Must come over this fall with the boys,' he said. 'Some day when our tasks are done early. Master Hyde never cares how much plum brandy we make ourselves, so long as we're sober by morning.'

Juliet, who had been prepared to be appalled at the conditions of the servants, had long since decided that Winchelsea was something quite different from the southern plantations that were the subject of furious pamphlets among northern abolitionists. It was true that each servant had his task, but so far as she could see, he could do it quite easily in a morning. In the afternoons, they went fishing, or collected oysters along the beach, or, if their talent turned that way, made boxes and baskets and a thousand other neat little objects for sale in the Saturday market at Savannah. When she had needed a book-rest so that Hyde could read to himself in bed without disturbing the wounds on his shoulders she had merely stated her requirements in the morning and had it produced, perfect, the same evening.

Most touching of all, when she had visited Pete, who had made it, in his whitewashed cottage, he had refused to take pay. 'What we do for the master, ma'am, we does for love.'

It was all quite extraordinary, and not at all what she had expected. But, 'Don't think things are like this everywhere, ma'am,' old Satan warned her when she drew up Ariel to tell him something of what she felt. 'There's places, not far from here, I could tell you about, would make those pretty eyes of yours start right out of your head. And the owners don't much love Master Hyde, neither. We wondered, down in the cottages, whether that duel he fought was just what it seemed. There's plenty shake Master Hyde by the hand when they meet him at the Exchange, wouldn't shed many tears if they saw him in his winding sheet.'

His matter of fact tone was curiously frightening. She had meant to treat herself to a gallop along the hard sand of the seaward side of the island, but now turned impulsively for home. 'No need to fret,' old Satan turned his lumbering great horse behind hers. 'They'd not dare do anything open against Purchis of Winchelsea. Not here, anyways. Besides, we're on watch, all the time, down at the cottages. There won't be any false friends sneak past old Aaron — or that French Anne neither? —to bring on a "relapse". Judge James spoke of that to Aaron, right from the start. When they were talking of making a hanging matter of that duel.'

'What?'

'You didn't know? Oh yes, there was some fine folks in Savanny thought their chance had come at last. There's been some kind of a society years and years, supposed to put an end to duelling. And, course, by law, it's death. But I reckon Judge James was too many for them all. He's a good friend, the judge.'

'Yes.' The ride back seemed endless. A phoenix could have risen from the sweet-smelling orchards and she would not have noticed. She had left Satan well behind when she brought Ariel to a sharp halt in front of the house. Pete appeared at once to help her alight. 'Any guests, Pete?' She could not quite keep the anxiety out of her voice. It was all very well for Satan to talk, but how could the servants prevent a white man from seeing Hyde?

'Not a soul, ma'am. I reckon Judge James has passed the word round we ain't quite ready for visitors yet.'

Of course, she should have thought of that. With the exception of Sam Everett, only women had visited her. Just the same, she hurried Alice unmercifully, changed out of her riding habit and ran downstairs again to find Anne sitting placidly by Hyde's bed, with several yards of fine tatting trailing over her black skirt. Ridiculous to have panicked so. But just the same, 'Hyde,' she said, as soon as Anne had left them. 'If I go riding

again, will you promise not to see anyone while I'm out? Except the Judge, of course or Sam Everett.'

'Oh?' He raised an eyebrow. 'So that's why you came back so soon. Old Satan of course. He's been frightening you? Maybe you'd be best riding alone after all. Aaron tells me you stood no nonsense from Ariel.'

'Well, of course not.' She had rather thought Aaron had watched her departure from the side window, and wondered now whether this had been on Hyde's orders. 'After all,' she went on, 'I was riding troopers' mounts when I was still in short petticoats. I hope I can manage my own horse now.'

'Yes.' He sounded tired. 'Stupid of me to be anxious, but you've been cooped up here with me for so long. I'm ashamed not to have thought of you sooner. But it's such a pleasure to have you with me.' He reached out a thin hand to take hers. 'I can't tell you how the time drags when you're not here. What do you say, love?' His hand was firm on hers. 'When I'm better, shall we shock the good people of Savannah by changing our modish marriage for the real thing? Can you possibly imagine yourself as Joan to my Darby? Oh, I know — he felt her hand struggle in his, but would not let it go. 'Our understanding, in the first place, was quite other, but that was then, and France; this is now, and here. Do you not think, if we worked at it, that we might get as much pleasure (or maybe even more) from doing things together as from doing them separately? From going to the same parties? Riding together, maybe? And sending poor Sam Everett back to Boston?'

If only he would let go of her hand. How could she think when all her blood was on fire at his touch? 'Oh, Sam Everett,' she managed at last. 'What's he to the purpose? I hope I could find myself a better gallant than him, should I feel the need of one. There's always poor Mr. Jay.'

'And poor Mr. Purchis?'

'It's high time poor Mr. Purchis took his medicine.' She freed her hand to reach for the bottle. At all costs she must put

an end to this dangerous conversation. And not only to it. But she would not, dared not face that thought now, under Hyde's curiously intent gaze. There would be time for all that later; for the moment, she must get things back to normal as best she might. She reached out her free hand and picked up *Pride and Prejudice* from the bookstand across his bed. 'You are talking so much nonsense I think I had best read you into a calmer frame of mind. We don't want Judge James saying I have over-excited you. If you could but hear how he lectures me about keeping you quiet, you would not dare talk of going to parties, whether together or separately. Why!' she looked down at the open book. 'You've not read a page while I've been gone.'

'No,' he said. 'I was thinking about you.'

* * *

Her hand shook. Tears kept trickling down and blotting the page. She tore it up and started again. It had to be written, and tonight, while Hyde was safely asleep with the extra strong laudanum draft she had mixed for him.

'Dear Josephine,' she started for the fifth time. 'You must come back at once. I cannot explain.' The four previous sheets of paper, torn to tatters in the trash basket, were proof. 'But Hyde is a great deal better, and you must come.' She underlined the word 'must' three times, brushed a tear quickly aside before it fell on the paper, and wrote on, the goose quill scratching furiously. 'Satan will bring this. Come back with him. I will meet you at the wharf. No need for secrecy. All the servants know. And, this is the end, Josephine. I cannot go on. Forgive me.' Her signature was a scrawl. The tears were coming too fast now to be controlled. But it was done. The letter was folded, folded again, and sealed with Josephine's own seal, the eagle she had had designed in imitation of Napoleon's emblem. Josephine would be furious. It could not be helped. Bad enough that she, Juliet, had fallen in love with her substitute 'husband', but

this, this of today . . . She gave up trying to think, threw herself on the bed, and cried herself to sleep.

Waking early, to the first sounds of stirring life about the place, she longed just for a moment, to destroy the letter, to give way to the sweet, terrible temptation, and let what would happen. 'Joan to his Darby.' Oh, how easy it would be. But the hot tide of happiness that flooded through her had its own bitter backwash. 'And then?' she asked herself. If she let Hyde love her, as she loved him, what was there ahead for any of them but misery and shame? And Savannah, full of his enemies, waiting for just such an opportunity to destroy him.

She sat up in bed and pulled the bell-rope. 'Alice, there's a letter on the dressing-table. Tell Satan to take it to Ruffton at once.' She took a deep breath. 'The mistress will be coming back with him.'

'Oh, no!' But Juliet had struggled with enough objections of her own to make short shrift of Alice's. 'I'm sorry.' Her tone was final. 'I have made up my mind.'

'But you'll come back? Some day?' Alice was unashamedly in tears.

'I'm afraid not.' Their eyes met and suddenly no more needed saying.

CHAPTER TEN

Satan could not possibly fetch Josephine back until after luncheon. The morning must be got through somehow. Juliet kept close by Hyde's bed, partly because she could not bear to lose one of these last, precious minutes with him, partly because she was aware that word of her leaving had run like wildfire

through the house. So long as she stayed with Hyde, she would only get reproachful looks; anything more would be too much to endure.

Blessedly, Hyde was looking much better today. The long, deep night's sleep had done him good. 'I shall be thinking of getting up soon,' he said.

'Not until you have the Doctor's permission, you won't. And he's not coming today.' This, too, was a blessing.

'Oh that Doctor!' He pulled himself up among his pillows and she was quick to adjust them behind him. Touching him was a new reminder of anguish. 'You're tired today,' he said, 'I can feel it.' Luckily she was still leaning down behind him, so he could not see her face. 'It must be my turn to entertain you. I know! Let us be devils and play two-handed whist for dollars.'

'Hyde! I'm surprised at you. Whatever would Miss Abigail say?'

He smiled at her and her heart seemed to lurch up into her throat. 'Do you know, my dear, I sometimes think I have let myself take Aunt Abigail's views a trifle too seriously. If we want to gamble away our own money against each other in our own house, do you see any serious reason why we shouldn't? It's not as if we were impoverishing our heirs, is it? And if I've heard you say once that playing cards without stakes is like eating bread without butter, I've heard it a thousand times. So, quick, fetch my table, and the cards, and have at you!'

'That's all very well,' she recovered her light note with an effort, 'but Hyde, I haven't a feather to fly with. The doctor's summons came just after I'd lost my shift at Mrs. Bolton's. I hadn't even the time to go to the bank for more funds.'

'And you've been penniless ever since? My poor Jo, what a disastrous plight.'

'Well,' she said lightly, 'it hardly signifies here.' Though she remembered the pang of relief she had felt when Pete refused payment for Hyde's bookrest. The money Hyde had given her

was spent long since, and it had been no moment to ask Josephine for some when they made their last, angry exchange.

'No,' he looked at her with wry sympathy, 'not so much as a new ribbon to be purchased, my poor darling. And yet what a picture — and what a different one — you manage to present every day. I cannot begin to tell you how you brighten my sickroom.'

'La, sir! Compliments from a husband! You will put me quite to the blush.' It was all too true; he had. But she made a quick recovery. 'So next time we are in Paris you will remember not to complain of the vast number of new gowns I order.' Safe enough to assume this had been one of the causes of friction between him and Josephine.

'Next time we are in Paris! Delicious thought. Shall we sail on Mr. Scarbrough's *Savannah* in the spring? For a second honeymoon?' And then, aware of something in her expression. 'Nonsense, of course. Poor Mr. Updyke would shoot himself if I didn't go right back to work when I am well enough. Europe will have to wait. But in the meanwhile, we must do something about your finances, my poor bankrupt. Ring the bell, would you?'

It had been only one of the many surprises Winchelsea had held for Juliet to find that Aaron was in complete charge of his master's finances. Now he accepted the order to fetch the mistress a hundred dollars without so much as blinking.

'A hundred!' Juliet protested when he had gone. 'But, Hyde, that's absurd!'

'Not if we are playing for five dollar stakes,' he answered reasonably.

'I believe you have run quite mad.'

Miss Abigail, paying her regular morning call, quite obviously thought so too. 'Whist!' she exclaimed. And then, observing the pile of coins on Juliet's side of the table, 'And for money!'

'Yes, and grievously I'm being drubbed, too,' said Hyde

cheerfully. 'I suspect you've been taking lessons, Jo. Come, confess? From one of those French admirers of yours in town? They're all devils at cards.' And then, 'Excuse me, aunt. I'm afraid I have got into careless habits with this forbearing wife of mine.'

'You certainly have.' Miss Abigail looked as if she could have supplied a different adjective.

'Why not join us?' Hyde ignored her forbidding expression. 'Three-handed whist is infinitely more entertaining than two, and I remember you as a past mistress of the game when we used to play with my father.'

'That was your father.' Abigail folded her lips into a tight knot, then opened them just enough to say. 'And not for money either.' She turned her quelling glance on Juliet. 'I will see you at luncheon, my dear.'

'But not for a scold,' said Hyde, as she made for the door. 'It was I, aunt, who suggested the game, and I may say I am enjoying myself hugely, even if I do look like ending up penniless. I wish you could eat your luncheon with me.' He looked up at Juliet as Abigail closed the door with a quietness that reverberated like a slam. 'I am afraid she is not always very kind to you.'

'Poor old thing,' said Juliet lightly. 'She can't help envying me my youth; or my looks,' she paused for an instant, 'or you.'

'Yes, poor thing indeed. Bad enough losing her lover in the War of the Revolution, but to lose him as she did — '

'Yes.' Clearly this was something she ought to know about. 'Poor creature. I promise I will be sweet as sugar over luncheon, scold she ever so hard. Oh — and Hyde, I thought I would take my ride directly after, while you are resting.' That way, she would only need to say good-bye to him, once and for all, when she left him for lunch.

'You mean you won't come and tuck me up for my sleep?' He laughed. 'You see what a spoiled darling of an invalid I am

becoming. It's high time you took the law into your own hands a little. I shall look forward to seeing you, and in better colour, I hope, when you return. Oh, botheration,' the sound of the gong that Aaron loved to beat echoed through the house. 'There is luncheon and I've not had a chance at my revenge. Don't forget to take your winnings and put them safe away in that locked box of yours. You've not lost the key again, I hope?'

'No, indeed.' Her hand went up to the chain round her neck. What a blessing this money would be, and yet how could she bear to take it?

'Where do you ride today?' he asked casually as she rose to move the cards off his table, ready for his luncheon tray.

'Oh,' the truth came out before she had time to think of a lie. 'I thought I might go down to the old wharf.'

'So far?' Something changed in his face. 'Then I must not expect you before tea-time. Enjoy your ride, my love, but do not forget that I shall be counting the moments until you return.'

'Oh, Hyde!' She must not say it. There was nothing in the world she could say. 'Take care of yourself,' she swallowed a sob. 'Be good, while I am gone.'

A knock on the door. Sam with Hyde's tray. 'Miss Abigail is served, ma'am.' With that look of silent reproach she had had from all the servants today.

And Hyde, from the bed. 'If you are gone too long, love, I promise nothing. But so far as the old wharf and back: about that, I believe, I can be reasonable. Only, kiss me for luck, before you go.'

Extraordinary request. They did not kiss, or at least only at formal greetings and leave-takings. 'Are you sure you deserve it?' she temporised. How could she bear to kiss him? How could he bear not to, just this once?

'Positive.' The blister was quite healed by now. His right hand pulled her down with a strength she had not expected.

'Bless you, my love.' Surely this once she might use the word.

Her lips brushed his cheek, then, with a quick twist she was free. 'Eat your lunch. Rest well. Be good.'

'Call that a kiss?' But she had escaped and was sobbing her heart out in the ladies' retiring room on the ground floor. When she joined Miss Abigail ten minutes later, it was almost a relief to have the whole meal devoted to the expected scold. She was late, she was frivolous, she was mannerless, she was leading Hyde into bad ways . . . It went on endlessly, and she crumbled her bread, pushed scalloped oysters this way and that with her two-pronged fork, and listened, hardly hearing. Only, at the very end, rising to go and change into her riding-habit, she allowed herself one retort. 'And yet, Miss Abigail, it seems you trust me, since Hyde asked you not to scold me, and you assume that I will not tell him you have.'

It was a silencer. She escaped. Past Hyde's door. He would be sleeping now, since his light luncheon took much less time than the elaborate affair to which she and Miss Abigail had to sit down. Anne would be sitting beside him. She had managed to avoid Anne all morning. Even for one last glimpse of Hyde, she could not face her now.

Alice had been crying too. 'I don' know how we'll get along without you, ma'am.' She buttoned tiny dark green buttons unwillingly.

'You'll have to, Alice. But, please, for my sake, help her — help your mistress . . . Help her be kind to him.'

'Bless you, ma'am. We'd all give our lives. For *him*.'

The sun shone. Birds sang. A group of children playing in the dust outside the double row of whitewashed cottages came running up to beg for the candy she always carried for them. She handed it out mechanically. Must remember to tell Josephine about these new habits of hers. Old women smiled at her from their doorsteps. Men working in the cotton fields paused and straightened up to wave their hats to her cheerfully. She returned their greetings without knowing what she said. Never again . . . Never again . . . Never again.

Ariel was getting restless, aware of slack hands on the reins. She pulled herself together. This was no day to be run away with. Almost there. She could hear the voice of the river now, its quiet murmur along the sheltered shore of the island. Let Josephine only be there, ready. Let it be quick: and over. Tomorrow she would make her plans for going back to France. The money she had won from Hyde would pay her fare. No use hoping for anything from Josephine who would, inevitably, be furious. And to use Hyde's own money to abandon him . . . But how much worse, for all of them, if she stayed.

There. She came out of the tangle of wild plum and sweet-scented yellow jasmine on to the shore. The old wharf lay below her, deserted, but straining her ears she thought she could hear the sound of singing from upstream. It was a gay, lilting tune she had not heard before, and as it grew louder and the boat pulled into view round the bend of the river she felt a sudden surge of bitterness. Childish, of course, to expect the rowers to mind about her going as the house servants did. The boat swept nearer, racing down with the tide, black against the golden savannah grass of the swamps on either side of the river. The tune came over the water more clearly now, and she began to make out the words. Extraordinary. She had heard about this song. 'Day of glory, day of freedom,' it began, and though apparently religious, its message was obvious. It celebrated the day of liberation for the slaves. On some plantations, to be heard singing it meant a beating to which death would be preferable. Even on Winchelsea, she had never heard it sung.

'Day of glo—' The singing stopped suddenly, then began again, raggedly at first, an old familiar tune, 'Jenny shake her toe at me.' Stan, steering, must have seen her waiting there on the beach. But what of Josephine? She would never have allowed them to sing that song . . . Juliet looked about her, suddenly cold with terror in the sunshine of the lonely beach. Could Josephine have said or done, in her anger, something so unspeakable, uttered some threat so dreadful, as to precipitate

the revolt that every plantation owner dreaded? But here? On Winchelsea? Where every man was free? It seemed impossible. And yet, with Josephine, anything was possible. And, now, she could see. There was no elegant figure seated comfortably under the stern awning.

The singers had got into their swing now:

'Hurray, Miss Susie oh,
Jenny gone away.'

One last, strong pull and they were coming into the wharf, while Juliet tied Ariel to the hitching post with trembling hands and ran down to meet them.

'Satan.' She had never thought his name inauspicious until now. 'What have you done with her?' Probably she should be afraid for her own life, but what did she care about that?

'Done?' Satan paused to give the last orders to the rowers, then jumped ashore to join her on the rotting wharf. She had forgotten how huge he was, and how black, silhouetted there against the golden beginnings of sunset. He looked down at her. 'Ma'am, you're never frit of me? Old Satan?' Could there be, actually, a note of scorn in his voice? 'You should go for to have more sense, missy.' Something extraordinarily reassuring both about his tone and the use of the less dignified form of address. He scratched his coarse white curls, obviously thinking it over, then, disconcertingly, burst into a great bull's roar of laughter. 'Lawd-a-mussy-me, you never went to think we dunked her in the river back there?' He was literally laughing till the tears came. 'Law, miss — ma'am — ' he was pulling himself together. 'How I wish we had. Hey, you boys,' he shouted down to his crew, who were resting on their oars, probably within earshot. 'Take her round to the main dock, and leave her all right and tight as if I was watching you, I'm going to walk the mistress back across the island.' He turned back to Juliet, his voice extraordinarily gentle. 'You didn't ought to be out on your lone,

if you can think such things, ma'am. Not that I blame you, the things gets said. Just the same,' he was unhitching Ariel, 'I reckon you've got plenty spunk to stay and wait for us, thinking what you did. There: up you go. Why didn't you turn and run for it, when you thought that?'

'I don't know.' She thought about it, 'Satan, I ask your pardon. I should have known better. I think, really, I did. That's why I didn't turn and run.'

He was leading Ariel, well aware that she was in no state to control him. 'Thank you, ma'am.' He smiled up at her, that immense, heart-warming smile. 'I reckon that's the first time I've had pardon asked me by someone white since Master Hyde was a little 'un. But you're worriting all this time about the mistress. Well, I'm sorry, if you wanted her back, but she's vamoosed.'

'What?'

'Cut and run. Well,' fairly, 'it's Charleston Races this week. You wouldn't really expect the mistress to stay stuck in that dismal old house up there, when the races was on, now would you?'

'Dear God.' She might have known. 'But you sent a message?'

'Ma'am, how could I? There warn't no one there. Not even old Sukey. Just a note stuck on the door.' He reached into the deep pocket of his osnaburgs. 'Ain't it just a lucky thing the master always wanted us to learn to read? See: there it says, in big letters so anyone could read it: "Gone to Charleston to the races." She don't say nothing 'bout when she's coming back, so there didn't seem much sense staying round waiting. Races last weeks, see.'

'Yes.' She did indeed see. Once in Charleston, Josephine would never return to what even Satan called 'that dismal old house'. She would stay, hidden one must hope, somewhere in Charleston. Presently, in her own good time, she would send her new address. In the meanwhile, 'Where are we going, Satan?'

He smiled up at her again. 'We're going for your ride, ma'am. I reckon you need a mite o' time before we go back to the house. Besides, they won't be expecting you yet awhile, will they?'

'No. Thank you, Satan. I don't know what to do.' She spoke as much to herself as to him.

'I don't reckon there's much you *can* do, ma'am, but keep on as you are. And don't you go forgetting again that every man jack on the place is on your side.' He looked at her thoughtfully for a very long moment. 'Mebbe it's too bad she warn't there, the mistress. Supposing we had dunked her in the Savannah; it's no more than she's earned, over and over, and see how easy things would be then.'

'Satan!' A firm hand stopped Ariel in his tracks. 'I'll forgive you this once, but you're never to say that again, nor even to think it. Promise me?'

'Very good, ma'am. I promise. And I won't let the others think like that neither, which will be a hard thing, but I'll do it. And pray God for all of us.'

'Amen.' And then, suddenly aware of dwindling light. 'Satan, it's high time I was home.'

'Sho' is, ma'am. It's but to cut across the family lot and we'll be there in ten minutes.'

She had never chanced on the family graveyard before, hidden away as it was behind a screen of tall magnolias interspersed with low-growing evergreens. Her first, superstitious qualm at the idea of taking a short cut across it vanished the moment she saw it. This was a happy place, full of early flowers, the air sweet with the fragrance of hyacinth and narcissus. It was beautifully cared for, too, the coarse grass neatly trimmed round the grave-plots, the stones as clean and moss-free as when they were new. Around it, a thick hedge of cherokee roses was just coming into bloom, great white flowers with golden centres.

Instinctively, she dismounted, and let Satan lead Ariel

quietly along the central path, while she paused for a moment to read the Purchises long gone.

'The big one at the end; that's the first Mister Hyde,' said Satan. 'Him as came over with Oglethorpe and founded the place. And here's Miss Abigail's man, that the French killed.'

'The French?'

'You didn't know?' They paused together, Ariel snuffling affectionately at the old man's shoulder as they looked at the neat plot covered all over with the hyacinths Abigail loved. At the head, the white stone read, simply, 'Gils Habersham. Murdered at Toulon. December 20th, 1793.'

'Murdered?'

'That's what Miss Abigail said to put. Well, I reckon she was right. He was a loyalist, see, in the old days. When Mister Washington and his lot won, he had to get out — went to England, he did, and got little thanks, by what Miss Abigail says, for what he'd done, and less money. So he 'listed in their army, for bread like, and got killed by the French at that place it says there. Not in fair fight. They'd rebelled, see, and had to give in. He got left behind, somehow, and they hanged him. A Habersham. Miss Abigail's man. He's not there,' he explained, looking down at the sweet-scented hyacinths. 'God knows where he is. You need to bear with Miss Abigail if she don't much like the French.'

'Dear God, yes.' It was cold, now, in the little graveyard. The light was almost gone. 'Satan, we're late. We must hurry. But thank you for telling me.'

'We reckoned,' he lifted her lightly into the saddle. 'Aaron and I, you needed to know. To see why she goes on like she does. She comes down here every morning, to make sure all's right. Poor Miss Abigail. She hadn't seen him, when he died, for more'n ten years. Mebbe it was all for the best, really. She was pretty set in her ways by then. Poor Miss Abigail. You all right now, ma'am?'

'Yes.' Odd how thinking of poor Abigail had steadied her. 'Look, Satan! The lights are on in the house. We must hurry.'

'Yes, ma'am. *Won't* they all just be pleased to see it's you again, after all. I always did reckon the Lord looked after His own, and looks like I was right. Oh — ' his hand slowed Ariel for a moment. 'That song we were singing when we come round the bend. You know it?'

'Yes, I know it, Satan. That's what frightened me.'

'I don't know as how I blame you, at that. Ma'am, you won't tell the master we were singing it? We couldn't help ourselves, see, we were so pleased you'd have to stay.'

'Thank you, Satan. I won't tell.' They were on the carriage sweep now and could see Aaron throwing open the big doors. Lights inside the house made it seem suddenly darker. Juliet smiled down at Satan. 'Don't tell him,' she said, 'let's see how long he takes to find out.' And then, louder. 'That will do, Satan. Take Ariel round to the stables, will you?'

'Yes, ma'am, Mis' Josephine.' Satan's delightful grin was for a happy secret shared.

Juliet looped her habit over her arm and trod lightly up the shelving steps to the front portico. 'Thank you, Aaron.' Her cool voice was perfectly Josephine's.

Watching him bow respectfully and close the doors behind her, all without a word, she realised for the first time just how much the servants' behaviour towards her had changed since they had discovered who she was — or rather, who she was not. Now, as Josephine again, she felt Aaron's dislike almost as a physical thing between them. She threw him the whip she never used and drew off her riding gloves to let them fall on the floor as Josephine would. 'It's late.' She made it sound as if it was his fault. And then, because she could not help it. 'Has the master waked yet?'

He had bent, stiffly, like the old man he was, to pick up the

gloves. Now he straightened like a twenty-year-old and advanced a step, gazing at her, his dark face inscrutable in the shadowed hall. 'Yes, ma'am, he's waked, and been asking for you this hour and more.' If his tone held a question, she chose to ignore it.

'Oh, very well. I'd best step by in my dirt and tell him I've not been carried off by pirates this time. He always did say he liked the smell of horses.' Hard to keep her booted tread steady, almost impossibly hard not to hurry down the hall to the door she had never expected to open again. 'Well, here I am at last!' Her quick eye noted that the lamps had not been lit in the sickroom. Anne was doing her tatting by the light of one candle, while Hyde lay on the bed doing nothing. 'A fine welcome!' She advanced a step into the room. 'I quite thought from what Aaron said that you had been looking out for me. I'm sorry if I have disturbed your sleep. No, Anne, don't move. Since you're all so peaceful I'll go shift this stinking habit of mine before I think of taking your place.'

'Josephine?' The quiet figure on the bed shifted slightly.

'Who else? You're very glum here, all in the dark. And poor Anne ruining her eyes at that tatting of hers. One candle, indeed!' A vigorous tug at the bell-rope. 'We must have things gayer before I come to sit with you. Here, Sam —' As always, he must have been hovering outside the door. 'Fetch the lamps at once. I don't know what you're thinking of to leave them in the dark like this.' She prided herself that the angry tone was precisely Josephine's.

'Please, ma'am, he said — the master said, no lamps till you got home.' Sam's frightened voice told her all she needed to know.

'Malingering, Hyde?' She moved forward to stand over the bed, tall and straight in her dark green habit. 'You know Judge James says you must occupy yourself with getting better. Is this your idea of occupation?'

'My head aches with reading.' Surprisingly, for Hyde, he

sounded almost fretful. 'And I'm not at all sure I'm not running a fever again.'

'Oh, no!' She bent down to put a hand on his forehead. 'Hyde! You're making it up! I truly believe you have decided to be a permanent invalid. And if you think I'm going to stay cooped up here reading aloud to you for the rest of my natural life, you're crazy. That's right, Sam, lamps, and plenty of them.' She waited while the ritual of lighting up was completed, then turned back to Hyde. 'And only this morning you were talking of getting up. I'm sure I don't know what has got into you.'

'A megrim.' He pulled himself up in bed and she bent, automatically to adjust the pillows for him. 'I see no reason why your sex should have a monopoly of those. And, mind you, Jo, I may have urged you to take some fresh air and exercise, but I never asked you to abandon me for the better part of three hours. It never occurred to you, I take it, that I might even be anxious about you?'

'You really did think pirates had got me? Now, what an experience that would be. No, to tell truth, I came back by way of the family lot, and could not resist pausing to read the inscriptions. I thought it might make me bear with poor Abigail a little better.'

'Ah. So you did get that scold!' He sounded better by the minute. 'And serve you right, say I, for a heartless nurse. Now, off with you and change, and if you take more than twenty minutes I shall go into a decline.'

'Twenty! If I'm back inside the hour, it's more than you deserve. Keep him in order, Anne, and if he shows signs of moping, make him help you wind your bobbins.'

'Yes, ma'am.' Anne's voice told her that she was still not sure who she was. Of course, Anne had not been present when they were talking about Abigail earlier. Well, now for Alice. Closing the sickroom door behind her, she was aware of Aaron, actually hovering.

'Ma'am?' he said.

'Yes.' Impatiently. 'What is it?'

'Just to say, I'm sorry about the lamps. It was the master's orders.'

'Of course.' The hall was always well lit, and she could feel his anxious eyes studying her face. Unfair, and yet irresistible to go on keeping him in doubt. She swept past him, head high, riding boots clicking on the stairs.

In her room, lamps were lit and curtains drawn. Alice had been mending one of Josephine's frilled petticoats, but jumped to her feet when Juliet appeared. 'You're back at last, ma'am. I was getting anxious.' The tone was perfect — for Josephine.

'So was the master.' Irritably. 'I got a proper scold from him for being so late. He wants me back there in twenty minutes! I told him an hour was more likely. But just the same, stop your gawking, girl, and unbutton me.'

'Yes, ma'am. Directly.' Alice's hands were cold and shook a little, fumbling on the tiny buttons. Josephine would doubtless have exclaimed angrily. Juliet merely stood there, looking about the room, savouring the unexpected happiness of being back.

'What will you wear, ma'am? I put out the blue and the cream.'

'Wishy-washy,' said Juliet briskly. 'I feel like full dress tonight. Fetch me the golden taffeta from the end of the closet.'

'Oh, ma'am.' Suddenly Alice's arms were round her. 'It *is* you! I thought it was; I felt it was; I didn't dare be sure.' She was actually crying.

'Yes.' Juliet returned the girl's embrace. 'It's I, Alice, but how did you know?'

'Don't you remember? The madam spilt madeira all down that taffety, over Christmas, in Savanny. She told me to throw it away, only then you got back, ma'am, and said all it needed was the breadth taking out, and we did it together, you and I.'

'Good God, so we did. And I'd clean forgotten. Lord, Alice, it's lucky for me I've got you all on my side.'

'Yes,' said Alice soberly. 'I'm right down delighted to see you back, ma'am, but what I can't figure is what's going to become of us all in the end.'

'No more can I, Alice.'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Josephine sent her new address a week later, for what it was worth, which was not much. Writing from Legare Street, in Charleston she reported herself as dead bored with her hole-and-corner style of living, and off to Norfolk next day to make the trip down with her ship, the *Liberty*. 'I trust all goes well with you and your invalid,' she concluded. 'I can't tell you how glad I am not to have the nursing of him. Ask me what you will, when it's all over, I, and you shall have it.'

Juliet found herself actually laughing at the bitter irony of this. The only thing she wished for, was the one that Josephine neither wanted nor could give: Hyde himself. Alice was right to wonder what was to become of them all. For herself, Juliet could see nothing ahead but disaster. But in the meanwhile, she took her happiness as it came, in small bites, reading aloud to Hyde, laughing with him over the vagaries of the Misses Steele in Miss Austen's *Persuasion*, and, now that the doctor had pronounced him well enough to get up a little while every day, sitting with him on the rocking chairs of the shady porch, playing two-handed whist, or being beaten at chess, or simply watching the swift spring blossoming round them, with birds busy everywhere among the magnolias . . . Maddening not to be

able to ask Hyde their names, but she could not be sure that Josephine had not done so the year before.

More and more, as he grew stronger, she hated the wall of deception that she could feel hard as glass between them. And yet, in her heart, she knew she should thank God for it. It had been mere panic, mere imagination, she realised now, that had driven her to that desperate summons of Josephine. Because of the way she herself felt, she had taken Hyde's light-hearted remarks about their marriage far more seriously than he had meant them.

There had been nothing, since that day, to suggest that he felt towards her anything but the gratitude of patient to nurse, the friendliness enforced by companionship. When he was better, they would go their separate ways again, meeting from time to time at parties, other people's or their own, until Josephine returned to banish her. Characteristically, Josephine had given no clue in her letter as to when this might be. But in the meanwhile her marriage of convenience was as safe as it had ever been. It was mere feminine illogic that made Juliet celebrate this discovery with a passionage outburst of tears.

Luckily, this happened in her own room, where she had gone to fetch the last volume of *Pride and Prejudice*.

'You should let the boys run your errands for you.' Hyde rose to greet her when she rejoined him on the porch.

'And have their dirty hands all over my things?' How hard it was to remember her part these days. 'As it was, I thought I'd lost it. I've been searching this age. It had got tucked away underneath Mr. McCall's *History of Georgia*. Which I do not intend to read to you,' she added.

'No, I'm only surprised it should have found its way upstairs to your room. You must have mistaken it for *Alonzo and Melissa*.'

'Something of the kind. One book's very much like another to me,' she yawned prettily. 'But they serve to pass the time.'

'And, admit it, Miss Austen better than most.'

'Why, yes.' She remembered how they had laughed together over Mr. Collins. 'I confess I do find her surprisingly diverting. If you don't get better soon, I shall be turning blue-stocking.'

'But I am better. Even you, dragonish nurse that you are, must admit that. I am merely awaiting Judge James's return from circuit for his permission to go back to Savannah. It would be hardly courteous to go without, though, frankly, if he delays much longer, I shall be gravely tempted, and so, I am sure, must you be. You will be quite out of touch with society if we linger here much longer.'

Her heart plummeted. It had been bound to come, but she had refused to admit to herself how soon the idyll must end. Once back in Savannah, Hyde would go about his business as before and she must play her exhausting part without the curious kind of support his presence provided. But he was looking a query. 'Yes, indeed,' she made her voice lively. 'My friends are beginning quite to forget me. I've not had a caller these three days.' And at least, she reminded herself, these callers, carefully announced by Aaron, were so many more names and faces learned. 'I shall take Alice with me when we go,' she said now. 'That slut of a Kate can no more dress my hair than she can fly, while Alice is getting quite handy at it.' She must find out from Alice, or from Aaron, whether the servants in the town house also knew her secret. Very likely they did, and, if so, so much the easier. But she could not help a small sigh as she looked down the great alley of live-oaks, shimmering green now, with new leaves shining among the dark grey old ones and the paler Spanish Moss. A light breeze from the sea stirred the hanging garlands of the moss so that the whole avenue seemed alive, like spring itself. Strange to be so sure she would never come back here.

'My dear,' Hyde's rallying voice. 'Can you be quite well? You're never going to tell me you are sad to leave!'

'I am a trifle hipped,' she confessed. 'Well, think, how long is it now I have been acting the devoted nurse?'

'And acting it, if I may say so, to the life. You've certainly earned some town gaiety, if ever anyone did. I'm only sorry to think that I have tired you to such a point with my long convalescence. You must let Anne take over your duties, and rest a little before we move back to Savannah. We don't want the gossips saying I've had you shut up here, like Bluebeard, in my castle. It struck me when you came down, just now, that you do look a trifle fagged.'

'Thank you for the compliment!' She let herself break crossly into French. 'If I am grown so plain, it is no wonder you are eager to get back to Savannah, and society.' For a moment, their eyes met, then his slid past her to gaze down the long avenue.

'Talking of society,' he said. 'I believe we are about to have guests this minute.'

'Guests?' Her eyes followed his. 'It looks more like a deputation.' And then suddenly, terrifyingly, she remembered something Satan had told her. 'Hyde! Go indoors. Let me receive them? You're not well enough yet for such a party,' she hurried to explain.

He had risen lazily to his feet and was laughing down at her. 'You've been talking to the servants,' he said. 'I'm surprised at you, Jo. I know my people think me so much their friend as to be everyone else's enemy, but I promise you, they flatter themselves. Purchis of Winchelsea is still a name to be reckoned with. Particularly when half of Savannah is in his debt. They don't want to find themselves dependent on that nephew of mine any more than you do, my dear. He's a hard man, as you know, my nephew Giles. But, if it suits you, I think we will go in, and receive our guests, formally, in the drawing-room. It does, as you say, have the look of a deputation.'

It did indeed. Casting one anxious backward glance as she preceded him into the shady drawing-room, she counted at least half a dozen horsemen riding briskly down the long avenue under the shimmering green of the live-oaks. 'Hyde, call

me a fool, call me hysterical, call me anything you like, but tell Aaron to summon the men from the fields.'

'My dear Josephine.' His smile was quizzical. 'Are you seriously suggesting that we should send for the servants as protection against our friends?' And then, with a sudden, disarming change of tone. 'Idiot! Did you not see Sam run for the servants' quarters the minute they came in sight? They're going to get a very formal reception, something tells me. And you, my dear, have a smudge under your left eye.'

'Good God! Now you tell me!' She hurried to the huge glass to find the unmistakable trace of a tear across the exquisite maquillage she had learned to use as Josephine did. How could she have been so careless? She ought to hurry upstairs and repair the damage before their guests arrived, but nothing would induce her to leave Hyde alone to face them, servants or no servants. Working frenziedly with the corner of her cambric handkerchief, she was able, in the glass, to see servants hurrying out by the side entrance to take their places on each side of the front steps. They were not, of course, in livery, but she had long since got used to the casual garb worn by house servants in Georgia. And at least, thank God, they were there. Of course: she should have remembered. It was well on in the afternoon. Their tasks in the fields would have been finished long since. These were the ones who had not, mercifully, chosen to go fishing, or oyster hunting, or crab-catching along the shore.

'May I join you, my dear?' Hyde came to stand beside her at the big glass. 'I would rather not look too much the invalid when our friends arrive.' He worked swiftly to retie his cravat in the intricate fall she had admired once — how long ago it seemed.

'A *trône d'amour*,' she said admiringly. 'And with a used cravat, too.'

'No, no, my dear, must I always be putting you right? A waterfall. And have you, perhaps, noticed that Judge James is one of our party of visitors?'

So he, too, had been making use of the reflection in the glass. Maybe her fears had not been so nonsensical as he had tried to suggest. But now, recognising Mr. Scarbrough as well as Judge James, she knew that, mercifully, they were unfounded.

'It's a proper collection of the City Fathers,' Hyde turned away from the glass to look out across the verandah. 'Mr. Wayne the Mayor, Mr. Troup *and* Mr. Clark, Mr. McAlpin, Mr. Bolton, and, of course, your friend Mr. Jay, among others. You know them all, I think.'

She had picked up her fan and now fluttered it nervously. 'I vow, I'm so *bouleversée* by such a press of company I'll be lucky if I don't mix them all up and greet Mr. Jay with enthusiasm as the Mayor, and Mr. Troup as Mr. Clark.' These were the leaders, she knew, of the two opposing political parties.

'Don't do that, whatever you do! But here they come.'

The servants from the steps had run down to hold the horses. Aaron opened the drawing-room door wide, 'Some gentlemen to see you, sir.'

In the general confusion and the equally general pleasure expressed at the sight of Hyde actually up and better, Juliet managed to get through the greetings without obvious mishap, though several of the men she had never seen before and others not since the opening of Mr. Jay's theatre — how long ago that seemed. But anyway it was perfectly evident that all their thoughts were for Hyde. She thought she could have addressed Judge James as 'Mr. Monroe' and they would not even have noticed.

Oddly enough, this was the very name now on Mayor Wayne's lips. 'We've just heard,' he was saying to Hyde. 'The President is actually coming to Savannah: Mr. Monroe himself, and Mr. Calhoun the Secretary of War and General Gaines with him. It's a great honour for the city. The first Presidential visit since Mr. Washington's. Naturally, we wish to make it as successful an occasion as possible. We have been discussing plans for Mr. Monroe's entertainment ever since we

received the news. And, of course, the first question is, where is he to stay?'

Hyde smiled, and sipped the madeira that capable hands had poured for them all. 'For me, there's a question even before that one, which is, when is he coming?'

'Soon. The eighth of May. It does not give us much time for planning. And, you will understand without our telling you, that one of the first things we need to know is whether you will be well enough to act as a member of the reception committee.'

'Oh, that's of course. I've just been waiting for a visit from my friend the Judge—' A very friendly smile for Judge James—'before I returned to Savannah, and my business. I shall most certainly be in town, and honoured to serve on the reception committee, if you wish it.'

'That's of course too,' said Mayor Wayne. 'Savannah would be poorly represented without Purchis of Winchelsea. It's good to hear—and see—that you are so much better, and we must hope that the Judge confirms it. But, in the meantime, we will consider that settled. Which brings us to the next question, of where the President is to stay.'

'Yes indeed.' Juliet was aware of an increase of tension in the room, and of Mr. Scarbrough leaning forward eagerly in his chair. 'We must do our best to make the President of these United States as comfortable as possible. What had you been considering, gentlemen? Not, I imagine the City Hotel.'

'No.' This provoked a roar of delighted laughter. 'We thought that we should let Mr. Monroe see some of Savannah's best and newest architecture. Something of Mr. Jay's, in fact.'

'Oh, I see.' A long silence drew out as Hyde looked round the room. 'Which leaves the honour of entertaining him to rest between Mr. Bulloch, Mr. Bolton, Mr. Scarbrough and us.' He smiled across the room at Juliet, who had settled herself in an inconspicuous corner of the masculine occasion and was sipping cherry bounce as if she loved it.

'Precisely. The question is, which?'

'Yes.' Hyde looked from Scarbrough to Bulloch and Bolton. 'Will you think me a monster of inhospitality, gentlemen, if I waive my claim. I have, after all, an invalid's privilege, and though I know Mrs. Purchis to be capable of anything — certainly of entertaining our President at short notice, the fact remains that she is tired out with a long bout of sick nursing. Surely, if I may voice a view, the obvious choice is Mr. Jay's newest house, Mr. Scarbrough's. If, that is, it is finished?'

'Oh, yes.' Scarbrough leaned forward eagerly. 'We moved in after Christmas, you know. The only trouble is, Julia's in New York. She'll never get over missing such an occasion, but there it is. There's no way of getting her back in time. So I thought,' his smile went from Hyde to Juliet, 'since our house is the newest; if we let Mr. Monroe use it as his own; and if Mrs. Purchis would be so very good as to act as his hostess . . . That way, it seemed to me, if Mr. Bulloch and Mr. Bolton are agreeable, everyone would be satisfied.'

'It will be a great expense,' Hyde said. 'We should, I think, arrange, gentlemen, to help Mr. Scarbrough carry it. Aside from that, and if Mrs. Purchis and the others have no objections, it seems to me to be an admirable plan. After all, Mr. Scarbrough's is the largest of Mr. Jay's houses, and, by all reports, the most splendid. I very much look forward to seeing it and I think it only right that the rest of us should waive our claims, under the circumstances. As to the question of a hostess; your suggestion does us the greatest honour. My dear — ' He smiled across the room at Juliet.

She took a deep breath. Please God Josephine would be back in time. If not, they would probably never forgive each other. 'If you approve,' she said, 'I shall be only too delighted.'

The tension went out of the room. It was settled. Mr. Bolton looked relieved, and Mr. Scarbrough delighted, only Hyde, Juliet noticed, looked anxious. Now that the men had risen and broken up into small hard-talking groups, she felt free to move

over and join him, where he was talking to William Jay. 'You're sure you are strong enough?'

'Oh, that's of course, like everything else,' he smiled down at her. 'Will you enjoy entertaining America's President, my dear?'

'I expect so. He can hardly be more formidable than Bonaparte. But it's you I'm anxious about. You look troubled, Hyde — ' It was an effort to use his first name so publicly. 'Are you sure you are well enough?'

'Naturally, I'm well enough.' He had seldom spoken to her so shortly. 'If I am a little anxious — and I had not meant to show — it is lest this whole business prove too heavy a charge on my friend Scarbrough. I was just now discussing with Mr. Jay the possibility of erecting some kind of festive pavilion where the major part of the entertaining could take place. After all, even Scarbrough's new house has only so much accommodation. And everyone who is anyone in Savannah will want at least to see the President.'

'Yes,' said Jay eagerly. 'I was telling your husband, ma'am, that I can see no reason why we should not erect a pavilion in some convenient spot — Johnson Square perhaps — with accommodation for all the hundreds who will throng to see the President. The private entertainment could be at the West Broad Street house, which I hope you will find fit for the purpose, Mr. Purchis; the major public ones in my pavilion.' He was already happily employed in designing it in his head. 'With a huge American flag for the ceiling perhaps? Plain outside, of course.'

'An admirable plan,' Hyde turned away from him to speak to Mayor Wayne. 'I have another suggestion, sir. Is there any hope that the steamship *Savannah* will have arrived before Mr. Monroe does? It would add a splendid note to his visit if we could take him for a trip in her before she sails the Atlantic.'

'Just so,' said Mr. Wayne. 'Mr. Scarbrough and I had been discussing that very thing. It seems, strangely enough, that

there have been no bookings for the advertised trip to New York. We think it most probable that the *Savannah* will be here for Mr. Monroe's visit, and, in fact, start for England very shortly thereafter.'

'The first steamship to sail the Atlantic!' Juliet turned to Mr. Scarbrough. 'You must be a very proud man, sir.'

'Yes, indeed.' She thought he had lost a little weight. 'But I wish we had had any answers to our advertisements. A trip to New York would have been an admirable introduction for the ship.'

'And Julia — Mrs. Scarbrough might have come back on her, and got here in time to give Mr. Monroe the meeting. But tell me, do you and she still think of making the trip to England?'

'No.' He looked uneasy. 'No, I believe not. I do not think Julia will be home in time.'

'I'm sorry.' The party was beginning to break up. Only Judge James stayed behind to examine Hyde.

'Much better,' was his verdict. 'Yes, so long as Mrs. Purchis promises to keep a close eye on you, I do not see why you should not come back to Savannah, and join in the general excitement. I am sure we will have need of your good council. Besides, I have no doubt you would prefer to be in charge of your own affairs just now.'

'What did he mean by that, Hyde?' Juliet asked after the judge had left. 'About your own affairs?'

'Merely that business is not quite so good as it has been. It was bound to happen. The post-war boom could not last for ever. They've had just the same trouble in England, only it hit them sooner than it has us. Fortunately for me, having been over there, I saw it coming. I don't think you are going to have to do without your cherry bounce yet, my dear.'

'That's a comfort! But, Hyde; Mr. Scarbrough. I thought he looked far from well.'

'Yes, and McKinne with a face as long as fiddle, too. I am

afraid the failure of the *Savannah*'s proposed trip to New York may have come at a bad time for them. I just wish they would not let it show. The worst thing that could happen for any of us, just now, is a failure of confidence; a run on the banks . . . In short, I think, my dear, if you are agreeable, we will go back to town tomorrow. Would it be too much to ask that we give a party at once, of the most extravagant and frivolous possible kind, to celebrate my recovery and return to business?'

Her heart sank, but she knew Josephine would welcome such a proposition. 'The very thing!' And then, as it were reluctantly, 'So long as you are certain you're well enough.'

* * *

Miss Abigail amazed Juliet by kissing her when they parted. 'Take care of him, my dear.' And then, to add to the surprise. 'But I know you will.' It was at once olive branch and apology, and Juliet, kissed the old lady warmly in thanks and unacknowledged good-bye, could not help wondering what would happen when Josephine returned. Poor Miss Abigail . . .

But the carriage was waiting, the servants drawn up on the steps for their farewells. These, too, had an unacknowledged finality about them. Alice had summed it up, that morning, in the privacy of Juliet's bedroom. 'They're all in despair, ma'am. They know they'll never see you again. The madam's bound to come back, when she hears of Mr. Monroe's visit.'

It was what Juliet had thought herself. Now she was aware of the depth of feeling in old Aaron's 'God go with you, ma'am,' and touched by the sight of Sam actually scrubbing away a tear with a not very clean hand.

She was close to tears herself as they bowled away down the long avenue of ilexes. Luckily, she had too much to think about to let herself give way. No time to be thinking that she would never see Winchelsea again. Hyde had just made some casual remark about the journey. Which way did she want to go?

She had never made the trip by land. What in the world to say? 'Oh,' she smiled at him through the haze of unshed tears, 'the longer of the two, of course, on a fine spring day like this. The air will do you good, I am sure.'

'Yes, but I have the most sinking feeling you have forgotten your parasol. You will hardly wish to return to Savannah tanned like a gipsy.'

Her parasol! Josephine's parasol. Josephine's white skin that she had tried so hard to remember to preserve. How could she have been so stupid? 'Good God so I have! Tell Charon to stop, my dear. I am sorry, but I cannot; I positively cannot drive all this way in the sun without some protection.'

'That is precisely what I thought,' he leaned forward to give the order, then paused at sight of Sam, grinning all over his face, barebacked on a pony, a flounced parasol brandished like a musket. 'The Campbells are coming" ' he said. 'Or, to be precise, relief is at hand.'

Sam had drawn level, to lean down and hand the parasol to Juliet. 'Alice sent me, ma'am. She said you'd done forgot this. She had the whole wagon unloaded to get it out. The Lord He knows when they'll get to Savanny. But you'll be all right, anyway, with this.'

'Yes, thank you, Sam. And thank Alice for me, too. It doesn't matter how late she is, tell her. I shall manage.' She turned to Hyde as Sam wheeled away, obviously delighted with the excuse for a ride. 'I cannot imagine how I came to be so shatter-brained.'

'No more can I,' he agreed gravely. 'Mrs. Purchis without her parasol!' He leaned forward. 'We'll go the long way into town, Charon, by the Cottage.' And then, to Juliet. 'You would not like, I suppose, to stop, just for five minutes, and call there?'

The Cottage? What Cottage? And who in the world lived there? She bristled at him. 'The Cottage! Calls! When you are just up from your sickbed! I never heard such nonsense in my life.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

In Oglethorpe Square, the Pride of India trees were blossoming, their lilac-coloured flowers exquisite against delicate leaves and brown berries that still hung on from the autumn. 'I'm glad to see there are a few berries left to make the robins drunk.' Hyde helped her to alight.

Berries? Robins? Drunk? 'What nonsense you do talk,' she said indulgently, and turned to greet the house-servants who had run out at sight of the carriage.

The big silver tray in the hall was full of cards and notes, neatly arranged in two piles, the larger for her, the smaller for Hyde. They terrified her, but she knew Josephine would be eager to open them. Besides, it might be wise to do so with Hyde at hand to be casually probed for information. 'Just look at them all!' She pantomimed pleasure. 'I believe I'll have a glass of cherry bounce and take a quick look before I change.'

'An excellent notion.' Hyde followed her into the small parlour, carrying his letters. 'As always, I see, you have the lioness's share. But I have a piece of news for you, just the same. Moses told me. What do you think of the *Savannah* being here already?'

'What! So soon? And we've missed all the excitement of her arrival?'

'I'm afraid so. But we might drive over this afternoon, just to take a look at her, if you would like to?'

'Oh, yes. I should like it above all things! And here's an invitation for this evening.' She made herself sound delighted. 'The Broughtons are giving a concert. Priscilla particularly

hopes that I will be able to come, to celebrate my return. News travels fast here.'

'It always has,' said Hyde. 'You'll go?'

'Of course. And you?'

'I beg you will excuse me. Priscilla Broughton will play her harp and her daughters will sing. I think it is more than a convalescent should be expected to endure.'

'Shame on you! And I know well enough what you would be at. You will be off to the Club, to meet your friends and talk business.'

'Well,' he said reasonably. 'It's a long time since I have done so.'

'Just so long as you do not overtire yourself. Remember — ' she struck a more characteristic note — 'there is our own party to be considered. We cannot afford to have you on the sick list for that.'

Juliet felt oddly unprotected going out for the first time without Hyde. It was tiresome, too, that she had never been to the Broughtons' house, since they had been up north during here first, short visit to Savannah. But at least Priscilla and her three strapping daughters had visited her at Winchelsea. There would be no fear of her failing to recognise them.

The Broughton house stood in its own lot at the far end of Madison Street, beyond Chippewa Square, where the town ended and the common began. As her carriage turned in at the elaborate iron gates of the walled garden, Juliet remembered something William Jay had told her. Mr. Broughton's father had come from Charleston and had built his house in imitation of one of the Charleston single houses she had seen during her brief stay there. Yes, the carriage had turned on the sweep to draw up in front of the long porch of a big house standing sideways to the road. Steps led to the porch and above it she could see the second porch on the upper floor. What had Mr. Jay told her? 'They entertain upstairs,' he had said. 'Nonsense, it seems to me, since the downstairs rooms are inevitably cooler.'

She blessed him now, as she trod lightly up the porch steps and saw that the downstairs rooms were being used as cloak-rooms for the guests. She handed her light pelisse to the servant in attendance, took one reassuring look in the big glass, and went on upstairs as if she had known the house all her life.

Hyde had been quite right. Mrs. Broughton did play the harp, and execrably she did so. Then, to add insult to injury, she acted as accompanist while one plain daughter after another screeched out the romantic ballads that had been fashionable in Europe five years before. When the youngest one began on poor Mr. Burns's song, 'My love is like a red red rose,' Juliet thought her penance must be nearly over. She also became, uncomfortably, aware that she was being stared at. Well, nothing surprising about this. Alice, tying up her curls with a green ribbon that matched her dress, had confirmed that she was in looks tonight, 'You'll wipe all their eyes, ma'am, and no mistake.'

But there was, just the same, something disconcerting about the quality of this stare. She opened her ostrich feather fan, grateful for the hot rooms that provided her excuse, and waved it casually before her face for a moment, then held it still to peer through the green-dyed feathers. Yes, there he was, at the far side of the room, staring at her as if the very strength of his gaze would bring her eyes round to meet his, as indeed it had.

For a moment, eyeing him through the fringe of green feathers she thought she was going mad. It was Fonseca! Impossible. He lay buried, she knew, at Hyde's expense, in a remote corner of the Old Colonial Graveyard. Another covert glance was reassuring: this was not Fonseca returned from the dead. She had been misled by a superficial likeness. This saturnine stranger, dark and sallow like Fonseca, had also the look of a European. Something at once indefinable and unmistakable about the cut of the evening dress and the way he wore it marked him as from the other side of the Atlantic.

Now, despite the concealing fan, he must have become aware

that she was looking at him. A finger went up to his lips, casually, as if to stroke the luxuriant moustache, his message for her only. Keep silent. But what in the world was she to keep silent about?

The singer was quavering to the end of her song:

'Till all the seas gang dry, my love,
And the rocks melt in the sun,
And I will love you still my love,
Till the sands of life are run.'

What nonsense it was, Juliet thought, joining enthusiastically in the applause, and how she hoped Miss Deborah would not be incited to give an encore. The rest of the audience seemed to be of the same opinion. There was to be dancing, later, why waste more time in this penance?

Mrs. Broughton had something to say. She was urging the gentlemen to escort the ladies across the hall to the refreshment room, and, coyly, suggesting that she had provided illuminations outside in what she modestly referred to as 'the yard'. If any of them wished to see her European knot-garden, it was but to fetch a pelisse or a shawl; they would find it bright as day out there.

Of course. Juliet remembered her now, enthusing, with obvious jealousy, over the mature gardens of Winchelsea. 'I'm a bit of a gardener myself,' she had said. 'As you well know, Mrs. Purchis. Nothing like yours, of course.'

The move across the hall had begun. Juliet looked around, almost frantically, for someone she knew. Where was William Jay tonight? Doubtless, like Scarbrough and various others of Hyde's friends, he had cut this party in order to meet him at the Club. Very likely, now, they were snug over smoked oysters and punch, deciding how to entertain the President of the United States.

And the dark stranger was waiting for her, inconspicuously,

in an alcove of the hall that must be crossed to reach the refreshment room.

'*Enfin.*' He held out his arm, as if to lead her downstairs and out into the garden, but Mrs. Broughton, who was hovering in the hall, marshalling her guests, was on to him at once. 'Why, Monsieur Tarot, I thought you knew our Savannah customs better by now. You will take Mrs. Purchis in to supper if you please. And, by the by, I collect you to have not met before. Josephine, my love, allow me to present Monsieur Tarot, recently from France. You will find him, I know, as irresistible as all the rest of us have done.' A roguish smile. 'After supper, monsieur, you may take your partner out to admire my garden, if she pleases.' She turned away, to make an unwilling young lawyer squire her plainest daughter.

'*Josephine, mon amour,*' the stranger echoed Mrs. Broughton's phrase, but in French.

'Let us speak English, sir. It is more polite, here, where so few understand French.' But there was nothing for it but to let him take her arm.

'More polite, perhaps, but more dangerous.' This, again, in French, then, at her quick, angry glance, changing to equally fluent English. 'Very well, madame, since you insist, let us by all means drink our second-rate champagne in English, so long as, afterwards, you will give me the pleasure of a French turn in the garden.' There was something so extraordinary about his tone that Juliet thought, if Hyde had been there, she would actually have run to him for help and comfort. But Hyde was at the Club, eating smoked oysters.

She smiled up at the stranger — Monsieur Tarot, Mrs. Broughton had called him, but something about his expression had told her that this was not his name, and that Josephine would have known. 'Very good, sir. But let us not forget that I am starving.' They were across the hall now, in the crowded room where refreshments were being served, and private conversation was impossible. Mercifully, everyone seemed to know

Monsieur Tarot, so introductions were unnecessary. 'You have been in town for some time, sir?' She made it the casual question of a new acquaintance.

'A few weeks. Long enough to hear everyone sing the praises of "the devoted Mrs. Purchis". I cannot begin to tell you how I have looked forward to this meeting, madame.' His tone warned her that she should understand infinitely more by this than the simple words. Whoever he might be, he was no casual acquaintance of Josephine's. What, oddly, she found herself unable to decide was whether the bond between them was one of love or hate. She pushed cold turkey and ham this way and that on her plate, eating hardly at all. Anything to avoid the threatened *tête-à-tête* in the garden. If she could only delay until the dancing began . . .

'I thought you were starving, madame?' His voice chimed in with her thoughts. 'The food is not to your liking? You will permit me to fetch you something else?' And then, seizing a moment when a broad masculine back shielded them from the rest of the room. 'You must see that we have to talk, Josephine, and the sooner and more privately the better. You do not, I am sure, wish me to make any public announcement about our relationship.' His smile was a covert threat. 'You must give me credit, I hope, for my self-restraint in awaiting you here in town, rather than paying you a visit in that splendid home of yours, which, frankly, I long to see.'

'Winchelsea!' The large man had moved away. 'Yes, you must certainly visit my husband and me there some time, monsieur. It is something quite out of the ordinary, I can tell you.'

'So I have heard. And also that Mr. Purchis is positively one of Savannah's leading citizens. I quite long to meet him.' Again there was no mistaking the threat in his voice. What could he tell Hyde about Josephine? 'He is not here tonight?' It was not, in fact, a question. He must have made it his business to find out.

'No.' She sipped champagne delicately. 'He does not share my passion for music, monsieur.'

'Then I shall have to defer the pleasure of making his acquaintance. But, come, madame. We must visit Mrs. Broughton's so-famous knot-garden. Let me relieve you of your plate and glass.'

She was about to protest she had not finished, when Mrs. Broughton joined them momentarily. 'My dear, you have eaten nothing. Not still fretting about that husband of yours, I hope?'

'A little.'

Tarot had seized the opportunity and handed her plate and glass to a servant. Now he held out his arm. 'Mrs. Purchis has promised to show me your knot-garden, of which I have heard so much, madame.'

Mrs. Broughton simpered. 'You will have all the young ladies running mad with jealousy, my love. But, of course, you and Monsieur Tarot will have a million things to say to each other about France.'

'Yes, indeed.' Tarot's strong hand had Juliet on her feet. 'I was telling Mrs. Purchis, just now, how much I had looked forward to meeting her — and her husband, of course.'

'That wicked absentee husband of yours,' Mrs. Broughton's smile was not entirely without malice. 'You must remember to tell him, my love, how well his place has been taken. You know, of course, that we are all quite wild about Monsieur Tarot.'

'Really?' Julia's voice was cool as ice. 'To tell truth, I had not so much as heard he was in town.'

'Then you have been ruralising indeed, my poor child.' But Mrs. Broughton had done with them, she was half turned away already to urge Mrs. Habersham to have another ice.

'You do not wish an ice, I trust?' Tarot's voice suggested that she had better not. 'They are hardly the novelty to you that they seem to be here.'

'Yes.' She was playing for time. 'The first commercial shipment of ice only reached Savannah this February —'

His harsh laugh interrupted her. 'You talk like an almanac! Is this what life with one of these charming Savannah merchants has done to you, my poor 'Phine? But, come, we waste time here.' His arm was hard under hers.

'Very well.' But still she hung back, anxiously scanning the rooms for a man she knew well: Scarbrough, Jay, even Mr. Bolton or Mr. Richardson would have been good for a 'chance' encounter that might have put off this alarming *tête-à-tête*. But by this time all the men who had managed to escape the service of the ladies had no doubt retreated to Mrs. Broughton's downstairs parlour, for the hot dishes and whisky punch that awaited them there.

'Come then.'

'But they will soon be striking up for the first dance! And' this was safe enough. 'You know how I love to dance.'

'I do indeed.' Like everything else he said to her, this was charged with more meaning than she could cope with. She was almost tempted to plead illness, to pretend a faint, anything to avoid the threatened interview. But what was the use? No hope of getting in touch with Josephine before they met again. To postpone it would be merely to make him angrier than he already seemed.

So, downstairs, she let him take her pelisse from a servant and drape it becomingly round her shoulders, then put her arm lightly on his to be led down the steps into the big corner lot, which was brilliant now with oriental lanterns. It was also full of other couples, pacing decorously among the mazy paths of Mrs. Broughton's European garden, and Juliet hoped for a moment that here, too, it would be impossible to talk privately.

But Tarot's grip on her arm had tightened so that it hurt. 'I am an old campaigner,' he said. 'As you well know. I took the precaution of reconnoitring the ground earlier in the evening.'

He was leading her, as he spoke, at a brisk pace across the heavy-scented knot-garden towards a hedge that showed high and dark beyond it. One last lantern marked a black gap in the hedge. No other couple was near. He whisked her quickly through the gap. 'The vegetable garden.' His voice in her ear was amused now. 'I expect some others will have had the same idea, but they will not wish to disturb us any more than we do them. So now, *mon amour*,' he changed firmly to French, 'what have you to say to me?'

'To say?' She too spoke French. After all, it was logical enough that as two French emigrés they should use their own language. 'Why, what would you wish me to say?'

'Or rather, what can you say?'

Her arm would be bruised in the morning, where he was holding it. Part of her mind was busy trying to think how she would explain this — or a sudden predilection for long-sleeved dresses. Absurd to let her thoughts wander so, when she so badly needed all her wits about her. He was furiously angry with her, that was clear now, or rather, of course, with Josephine. And, back there, he had given her a clue. 'An old campaigner,' he had said. 'As she well knew.' Very well then, chance it. 'My dear — ' Impossible to tell what term of endearment Josephine had used to him, if any. But after all, to her certain knowledge, they could not have met for over three years. This dangerous man, whose grip on her arm was hurting her so, must be part of that past of Josephine's, before Waterloo, about which no one knew anything. So: no use waiting for help from Anne. She would know nothing of him either. She took a deep breath. Before Waterloo. 'I thought you dead,' she used the familiar French form of address. 'One cannot mourn for ever.'

'No! So it seems.' His angry arm had been steering her, all this time, away from the gap where light showed through from the formal garden. A paved path . . . the heavy scent of honeysuckle . . . a corner of complete darkness where the hedge met

the high wall of the lot. And there, suddenly, he swept her into his arms for a bruising kiss. It took her so completely by surprise that for a moment she was helpless, aware only of his hard lips, hard body, arms like iron round her. Then, as he moved his arms to embrace her more completely still, she was able to free her right hand, to bring it up, with all her strength, crack against the side of his face.

'*Merde!*' He let her go. And then, still in French, 'So that's how it is.' He was breathing hard, the rage she had felt in him all evening exploding at last.

'I'm a married woman.'

'Why, so you are! How could I forget? And this is your welcome for one come back from the grave to you!'

'What else can I do?' But at least she had been right in assuming that Josephine had thought him dead.

'What indeed! "A married woman".' His voice mocked hers. 'And in love with your fine new husband? And just imagine that I actually asked myself if it was safe to come on you, plump, this evening. If you might not faint, or throw yourself into my arms, or something equally disastrous. I flattered myself, it seems.'

'I am afraid you did.' So this was what had been wrong, all the time, with Josephine's marriage to Hyde. This was the shadow that had lain between them. Very likely, Josephine would have thrown herself into his arms, or, at least, have wanted to. Well, there was nothing she could do about that. Josephine would have to unravel this tangle for herself, when she returned. Or rather, best of all, for Hyde's sake, Josephine must never know that the grave had opened to reveal this disastrous *revenant*.

'How long did you mourn, I wonder? A week? Ten days? A whole fortnight perhaps? And then, along comes the rich American and, pouf! Adieu!'

Now, suddenly, among all the turmoil of her own fears, she found time to be sorry for him. Raw feeling in his voice, that

savage embrace . . . He loved Josephine; had been sure of her; and now — this. 'I'm sorry.' The real sympathy in her voice silenced him for a moment. 'But you must see how it is with me. Hyde saved me from disaster, back in France, after Waterloo. And you — where were you?'

'You actually care to ask?' Savage irony in his tone. 'Well, *ma belle*, you shall hear. I was a prisoner of the Russians, taken at Waterloo. Oh, you were safe enough to think me dead. I might as well have been. While you were being rescued from "disaster" by this Monsieur Hyde who turns your voice to *syrop*, I was being dragged back to Russia by my captors. I was wounded, in case you are interested, half-conscious, delirious a good deal of the time, without the wits to demand an exchange, to declare myself, while we were still within the bounds of civilisation. When I recovered my senses, I was in St. Petersburg, treated like the common soldier I appeared. It has taken me three years to escape. But,' again that extraordinary bitterness in his tone, 'by what you tell me, three days would have been too long! So now, here we are, you and I and this "Mr. Purchis" whom you adore.' He laughed, suddenly, harshly. 'This scene does not play itself as I had expected. Do you know, *ma mie*, I had thought you and I would be planning, together, how we should make the most of our — well, shall we call it unusual situation? And now, I find myself planning alone.'

'Planning what?' If she had been frightened before, now she was terrified.

'Revenge?' He thought about it, for a moment, there in the dark, then she felt his shrug. 'What's the use? I have lost you, *ma chère*, and there's an end of it. Tomorrow, when the bruise on my cheek begins to show, will be time enough to think of that. Tonight, let us think of what I have gained.'

'And what is that?' She shivered in the warm air.

'What do you think, *petite*? One does not escape from Russia loaded with diamonds. Nor is there a livelihood, or even a

welcome, waiting for Napoleon's followers in France today. I was lucky. I escaped from Russia across the Baltic to Denmark. There was an American ship loading in Copenhagen.' His hand was hard again on hers. 'Have you happened to notice my callouses? I worked my way across the Atlantic, before the mast. They bled a good deal at first. Not that you would care. At least my earnings (and my winnings: you will be glad to hear that I have not lost my skill with the dice) were enough to set me up, when I landed in Charleston, as the gentleman I am. They will not last long. Was it not a fortunate thing for me that I chanced on an old copy of the *Savannah Georgian* with the news of your marriage to Mister-so-rich-Purchis, and, best of all, your return to Savannah. I was using it, if you must know (the newspaper) as a blanket. When I read that notice, I knew I need never be cold again. But I am desolate,' he meant it, 'that it is only your money that will warm me, not you.'

'Never.' If it had been half a question, she left no doubt about the answer. There was no doubt, either, about her position, or rather Josephine's. Or, come to that, Hyde's. All too clearly, Tarot could ruin Josephine, if he wanted to, and therefore Hyde. 'What do you want?' she asked.

'What do you think? Since I cannot have you, the only woman I ever thought to love, by God, I will have everything else. What shall we say? A thousand dollars to begin with? That should keep me in shirts and cravats for a while.'

'A thousand *dollars*?'

'Picayune, you think? Perhaps you are right? I should have said a thousand pounds.'

'Impossible.' If only she knew what term of endearment Josephine would use towards him. 'You must understand my position,' she went on. 'If I tell Hyde, all is lost. He is — ' she paused. Incredibly dangerous ground here. 'He is a gentleman. He would . . . I don't like to think what he would do. But, pay he would not. So, if you want your "livelihood" you must keep your demands within what I can reasonably pay myself.'

'Ah,' It was, curiously, a sigh of satisfaction. 'There's my old Josephine. You're right, of course, *ma mie*. Since we understand each other so well on this, who knows what we may not achieve when this honeymoon of yours is over. In the meantime,' he kissed the tips of her fingers lightly. 'I am your slave, as I was the Russians'. You will decide how much you can afford to give me . . . By the week. By the month . . . By the day, if you like. I am not faithless, *mon amour*. All through those bitter Russian winters, it was the thought of you that kept me warm, kept me alive. It would make me happy to see you every day, if only to receive the pittance you will scrape for me out of Mr. Purchis's millions.' He laughed again, that harsh laugh that frightened her. 'How dear do you think Mr. Purchis should purchase me?'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

As Juliet had feared. Anne was no help at all. She had never heard of Monsieur Tarot, nor of anyone who answered to his description. 'You're right. It must have been that time before Waterloo, when Josephine went off by herself. When I saw her again, after the battle she looked — it's hard to describe.' Anne was not a woman given to fine phrases, but now she produced one. 'She looked as if she had been down into hell. And,' she was remembering, 'she went out every day by herself, among the common soldiers. I was terrified for her.'

'She was looking for him? Or for news of him? Poor Josephine. But why among the common soldiers, I wonder? He said something about that; something I did not understand. A spy, perhaps?'

'Oh, poor Josephine,' Anne echoed her. 'But she must be told.'

'Yes.' During the sleepless watches of the night, Juliet had come to the same conclusion. Whatever disaster it might mean, she had no right to keep the knowledge that Tarot was alive from her cousin. 'I shall send to her today,' she said. 'Besides, the money she left me will not last long, I can see, under Tarot's demands. Thank God, he knows nothing of the settlement Hyde made on Josephine. He thinks I have to squeeze the money out of him, cent by cent. He is prepared to wait, he says, but how long . . .'

'So what will you do?'

'Write to Josephine in Legare Street and pray God she returns to Charleston soon and gets the letter. In the meantime, I shall develop expensive tastes. Think of the new gowns I'll need to entertain President Monroe!'

'Yes,' said Anne unanswerably, 'but why should you not pay for them out of your own money?'

'*Peste!*' Juliet lapsed furiously into French. 'You're right! I *cannot* ask monsieur for money. Specially not when he was so generous before Christmas. Well — ' It had been at the back of her mind all along. 'It will just have to be the jewels, that's all.'

'Madame's jewels? She'll never forgive you.'

'I can't help that. Whose fault is all this anyway? Besides, if I give them to Tarot one by one, as reluctantly as she would, it will be the most convincing proof that it is all I *can* give.' She unlocked Josephine's jewel box and looked in the compartment where she kept her money. It was characteristic of Josephine that she had never thought about her cousin's finances when she rushed off first to Charleston and then to Norfolk. It was not, Juliet thought now, ruefully counting, that she had been particularly extravagant, but the small comforts she had bought for the servants at Winchelsea, the daily sweetmeats for the children, had mounted to a larger sum than she had realised.

The incidental expenses of the party for Mr. Jay had swallowed up that life-saving present of Hyde's. Her windfall of winnings from him had kept her solvent for a while, but now that she was back in Savannah there were all kinds of inevitable daily expenses. 'I don't think I dare give Tarot any of this,' she decided, replacing her dwindled hoard in its hiding-place. 'As it is, if Josephine does not return soon, I may find myself reduced to selling one of her pieces of jewellery, for my own expenses.'

'There's no way you could manage to draw on her account?'

'Unfortunately, I do not add forgery to my other accomplishments.' She looked down at her bruised right arm that was concealed, today, by an unseasonable, long-sleeved dress. 'Suppose I was to hurt my hand?'

'Mr. Purchis would insist on sending for the doctor.'

'Yes, well: if the worst comes to the worst, I shall just have to *hurt* it. But, in the meantime, I must husband my resources, and fend Monsieur Tarot off with fair words and small jewels. Which do you think Josephine will least mind losing?'

'God knows.' Anne actually looked frightened.

'Or, more important, which will Hyde not miss?'

'The ones you've not been wearing,' said Anne at once.

'Yes,' thoughtfully, 'which I suspect are Josephine's favourites. The big, striking ones. Hyde remarked, only the other day, that it was a long time since I had worn the sapphires he bought me in Paris. These, I suppose.' She opened the leather box and looked at the glittering *parure* with distaste. 'Sapphires in gold. I cannot imagine how Josephine could have made such a mistake.'

'You don't know what she was like, then, in Paris. She was — ' Anne paused. 'Hungry.'

'Hungry enough to swallow this!' Juliet put on the ornate necklace and looked at the effect without enthusiasm. She added the earrings, which were made in the shape of blue and

gold flowers. 'They're not so bad. I'll wear them tonight, and promise them to Tarot.' She thought for a moment. 'I shall tell him that I cannot give them to him until after our own party next week; that Hyde will expect me to wear them then. At least, that will give us some time.'

'Will he be satisfied?'

'We must hope so. By what he said, he is not entirely out of funds yet. He will not want to kill the goose that lays his sapphire eggs. Yes, I think he will be satisfied.'

'Will he come to our party?'

'I think I must ask him. No use making him angry unnecessarily.'

'Then you will have to wear the complete *parure*.'

'*Mon dieu*, so I shall! Alice!'

Alice had been quietly busy about the room as they talked. She had noticed the bruise on Juliet's right arm before she had herself, had exclaimed and been told the whole story. The long-sleeved muslin, fetched from the very back of the closet, had been her suggestion. Josephine had had it made, she had explained, when she first arrived in Savannah, for fear of sunburn. 'You remember, ma'am, you forgot your parasol yesterday.'

'Of course! What a fortunate thing. And I have a slight burn today.' Juliet had looked ruefully at the bruises on her arm that told their tale only too clearly. No use to try and pretend they resulted from anything but a man's furious grip. 'It is going to have to last a long time, my burn.'

'Yes, but remember, ma'am, you have such a sensitive skin. No one will be surprised, least of all the master.'

Now Alice came forward with an armful of dresses. 'I could put sleeves into all of these, I think.' She grinned. 'You will most likely find you've set a new style.'

'Yes. And how hot and wretched I shall be in the mean time! But, Alice, what in the world am I to wear with these?' She held out the box with its glittering contents.

'I was thinking about that, ma'am, while you were talking. And, don't you see, it comes out nice and easy You must be in a proper taking about your burn, and the long sleeves, and looking so dowdy and all. So, you tell the master, you're going to wear your best jewels, to carry it off.'

'Of course! Bless you, Alice, what would I do without you? And you, Anne! Now, I must write a note to Josephine. Alice, will you see that it gets safely to Charleston? Please God, she'll be there by the time it is.'

'I wouldn't count on it,' said Anne.

* * *

Tarot had told Juliet that he would meet her at the theatre that night. It was bound to be a full house, since a touring company was putting on *Lovers' Vows*, Mrs. Inchbald's popular adaptation of Kotzebue's play. 'I know your theatre well,' he had promised her. 'I will see to it that we have a private moment.'

It was sheer bad luck that made Hyde inquire, when Juliet was already dressed, what the play was.

'*Lovers' Vows*,' Juliet said without enthusiasm. 'I doubt I shall be bored to distraction, but I promised Mrs. Broughton that I would join her party.'

'Not the play that caused all the trouble in *Mansfield Park*? Do you know, I find myself strongly tempted to come and see whether it is really so shocking.'

'Oh!' Here was disaster. 'But, consider, my dear,' she recovered her tone quickly. 'You have been out and about all day. You look worn out. I cannot think Judge James would approve of any more gadding.'

'And you are all ready to go, and do not wish to wait while I change my dress? Does Mrs. Broughton call for you?'

'Yes. Any minute now. Hyde, do be sensible. You know how tedious you find her, and how hot the theatre will be. And all

her daughters are coming too.' She hoped it would be the clincher.

It worked the other way. 'In that case I feel in honour bound to act the good husband and come and keep up your spirits. But no need to keep Mrs. Broughton waiting. I will walk over when I am ready, and join you.' He was half-way up the stair when he turned. 'And, talking of the heat in the theatre, are you wise to be wearing long sleeves? Charming though you look in them.'

'Oh, the most tedious thing. I contrived to burn myself yesterday, just in that short time I was without a parasol. My arms are not fit to be seen today.'

'My condolences. And all the more reason why I should be your squire tonight, rather than some stranger who might hurt you by too strong a grasp. I will be with you directly.'

The sound of a carriage outside ended the conversation, to Juliet's relief. Frightening to have had him come so near, by accident, to the real reason for her long sleeves.

'Mrs. Broughton was as delighted as she was surprised to hear that Hyde was to join them. 'Monsieur Tarot's nose will be quite out of joint when he sees you actually squired by your husband. I am sure that is not at all what he had in mind when he begged to be allowed to join my party. See, girls, there is hope for you yet.' Looking them over, as they alighted after the absurdly short drive to the theatre: 'Geraldine, your necklace is twisted; Lucinda, your dress is creased; Deborah, stop slouching this instant.' She turned to Juliet, who wondered for a wild moment what sergeant-major's comment she would have for her. When it came, it was predictable enough. 'Long sleeves, my love? You are like to be baked alive in the theatre.'

'And serve me right for a careless fool.' They were entering the brilliantly lighted foyer. 'I forgot my parasol, coming in from Winchelsea yesterday, and am burned like a lobster today.' She was looking about her eagerly as she spoke, hoping to snatch a word with Tarot before Hyde arrived.

William Jay and two gangling young cousins of the Broughtons had come forward eagerly to greet them and make themselves useful in taking pelisses and shawls and getting the ladies comfortably settled in the pair of boxes Mrs. Broughton had taken in the lower tier. 'Monsieur Tarot is late as always,' she said with some apparent satisfaction. 'Even your charms, my dear, are not powerful enough to mend his manners. I doubt we shall see him before the interval.'

Hyde, on the other hand, slipped quietly into the seat behind Juliet just as the curtain rose for the first act. 'I could not bear to miss the great discovery scene between Agatha and Frederic,' he whispered. 'Do you think this Agatha will contrive to be as "maternal" as Maria Bertram?'

'Hush!' said Juliet.

The play was just as nonsensical as she had predicted, but under other circumstances, she would have enormously enjoyed seeing it with Hyde, and tracing the course of those disastrous rehearsals in Sir Thomas's converted study at Mansfield Park. As it was, it was only by an immense effort that she could keep her mind on the action at all. Of the many anxieties that plagued her, one stood out paramount. Would Hyde, as she had, see a likeness between Tarot and Fonseca?

She got her answer soon enough. When the ornate curtain swept down and the audience rustled to its feet to move out to the front rooms for refreshments, Hyde took her arm with the gentle touch due to her "sunburn". 'Let us act Darby and Joan,' he said, 'and shock the gossips.' Mrs. Broughton was busy seeing to it that Mr. Jay and her two nephews did their duty by her daughters. 'Do you know,' he went on quietly. 'If I believed in ghosts, I would think I had seen Fonseca's as I came in.'

'Fonseca's ghost? Oh,' she managed a smile. 'You have seen an old acquaintance of mine, Monsieur Tarot. He is to join our party, Mrs. Broughton tells me. She seems to think I have made a conquest of him. Nonsense, of course; it is but that we

are old acquaintances from before Waterloo. But, it is true, when I met him last night I, too, was struck for a moment by the likeness to Fonseca. It's the foreign air, I think. There is no real similarity, but I confess I was taken aback for a moment. Poor Mr. Fonseca,' she added.

'Yes. Let us hope we do not find ourselves saying, "Poor Monsieur Tarot".'

She looked up at him, puzzled and frightened. Was this a threat, a warning, or, impossibly, a joke? He smiled blandly back, 'And here, if I mistake not, comes the gentleman himself, every exquisite inch of him. You must make me known to him, my dear. Every conquest of yours is of interest to me.'

'Not such a great conquest as all that.' She managed a laugh. 'You must allow me my little vanities. As you see, he is slow enough to join us.'

'Yes. One might almost think he was hoping to speak to you alone, waiting until I had done the gallant thing and gone off to fight my way through the crowd and fetch you an ice. You would like one, no doubt?'

'Oh, yes, please! It's stifling in here, and it makes my burn hurt. Anything cold would do: an ice, a drink . . .'

'You shall have it. And I will resign myself to finding you in full flirtation with Monsieur — what did you say his name is? — Farot? — when I return.'

'Tarot.'

'You do not sound altogether certain yourself.' How disturbingly quick he was to catch the nuances of her speech. 'I must certainly meet the gentleman. Keep him for me, my dear, I beg you.'

He had been, as usual quite right. He had no sooner vanished into the crowd of gentlemen round the buffet than Tarot appeared at her elbow. '*Enfin,*' he said. 'The husband, I collect?'

'Precisely. And eager to meet you. I have told him that you

are at once an old acquaintance and my latest conquest, so you will pray act the part.'

'It will be easy.' A languishing glance that she found detestable. Hyde had been right in what he said. Tarot was superlatively fine tonight. 'You are admiring my *tenue*,' he read her thoughts. 'You can see how completely I trust you, *ma mie*. I spent my last few *sous* today so as not to disgrace you tonight. You'd hardly believe, would you, that one could obtain so much elegance so quickly, here in Savannah. But at a price, I must tell you, at a price.'

'Yes.' This was her cue, and there was not a moment to be lost. 'But I must want you to expect nothing from me until after our party next week.'

'Oh? And why not, pray? I thought we had understood each other well enough last night.'

'Oh, *yes*.' Anguished conviction in her tone. 'I beg you to believe me that it is simply that I cannot find the funds.'

'The devoted husband is so close-fisted?'

'No! But — ' This was a safe enough chance to take. 'You know me. My allowance is paid quarterly. On the first of the month.'

'And here we are in mid-April and you have spent the lot?' To her heart-throbbing relief he laughed. '*Ma petite*, sometimes, last night, I found myself thinking you hardly yourself. Now, I can see I was wrong. You are my Josephine right enough. So — the allowance is gone until July! You are hardly suggesting that I wait till then.'

'Oh, no! You see my earrings?'

'I have been admiring them.'

'Oh, no, you haven't. They are in the worst of taste, and you know it. A mistake I made, back in Paris. But gold and sapphires, just the same. They are part of a set . . . my plan is to wear them at our party next week, and then you shall have them — A piece at a time,' she added hurriedly. 'It will be less likely to be noticed that way. I wear them very seldom.'

She did not like his smile. 'Keeping me quiet by instalments, *hein*? We have come a long way, you and I, since Waterloo. And the fine husband? You think he will not notice?'

'I hope not.' Passionately she hoped that before Hyde should notice, Josephine would be back to deal with her own problem in her own way. 'And here he comes,' she added, with relief. 'I had best make you known to him. As an old friend.'

'Yes, indeed. An old, old friend.' There was more in his tone than she wanted to understand.

And yet the introduction went off easily enough. Hyde was at his most agreeable, delighted to meet a friend of his wife's and eager to hear about Tarot's experiences in Russia. This innocuous subject lasted them to the end of the interval, when Hyde, somehow, was first in giving Juliet his arm. 'We have decided to set a new style, my wife and I,' his smile for Tarot was entirely friendly and Juliet breathed a sigh of relief. 'The Constant Couple, or something of the kind. Come, my love, or we will disturb your dear friends the Broughtons.'

* * *

The week that followed was so busy, both with plans for their own party and with arrangements for the reception of the President that Juliet hardly had time to watch for the message from Josephine that never came. To her relief, Tarot had merely paid her a formal call, had found William Jay and a couple of other young men with her and had contented himself with a brief visit and an expressive glance, as he said good-bye, round her sumptuously furnished drawing-room. He was, he told her, greatly looking forward to the party to which she had been so kind as to invite him.

So was not she. But each day's hope that Josephine would return and rescue her from her predicament was disappointed, and each day she found it impossible to decide whether she was glad or sorry. In the meantime, she got on with the preparations

for the party as best she might, ably assisted by Anne, Alice and old Venus. 'Of course Venus knows,' Alice had told her. 'They all do, by now. Here as well as at Winchelsea.'

'And haven't told?'

'Other folks' slaves? I should just about think not.' Alice was affronted. 'We free servants don't reckon much on those others. And as to telling the family's secrets; why, ma'am, we'd rather die.'

Another problem had been solved for Juliet, as once before, by Hyde, who summoned her into his study one morning and gave her what struck her as a simply immense sum of money. 'For the party,' he explained, as she wondered wildly whether here was a chance to pay off Tarot. 'I wish you to pay cash for everything,' he went on. 'It is unusual, I know, but so is the state of business in town.'

'Things are so bad?' She had been half aware, despite her own private anxieties, of a state of carefully concealed tension among their business acquaintances.

'Not good. Aside from the effect on public confidence, the President's visit could hardly have happened at a worse time. I only pray that the expense of entertaining him will not be the last straw for poor Scarbrough, who is deep in enough already, what with his new house and the *Savannah*. Will you mind very much, my dear, if, when this party is over, we retrench a little in our style of living? I would wish to be able to help Scarbrough if it comes to a crisis.'

'Of course I won't mind!' But, she thought gloomily, Josephine would. 'May we not move back to Wichelsea,' she went on eagerly, 'as soon as the President's visit is over?'

'You'd like that?'

'Of all things.'

'Then we most certainly will. And now, if you will excuse me, I must leave you, my dear. There are a million things to think of in connection with the President's visit. I can only

thank my lucky stars I can leave our own party in your capable hands.'

'Thank you.' The compliment brought her so near to tears that it was lucky he had already turned to leave her. She ought to be grateful that his affairs kept him away from the house for most of what would almost certainly be their last few days together. She found it impossible to make herself so.

The day of the party came, and still no word from Josephine. Juliet had secretly taken to studying the shipping lists, but could find no mention of the *Liberty*'s arrival at Charleston. Josephine must still be wind-bound at Norfolk. She sighed, set her teeth and went to make sure that the floor of the two rooms that were to be used for dancing had been adequately chalked. With Hyde's permission, she had made one change in the usual arrangements for a Savannah party. There was to be no separate downstairs buffet for the gentlemen. 'I hate your American ways of separating the gentlemen from the ladies at parties,' she told Hyde, who laughed and wished her luck in fighting it. 'And how about the waltz?' he had gone on to ask.

'Oh dear!' Suddenly she was coldly afraid, remembering that other party where Hyde had suddenly forbidden the waltz, she was sure, to prevent her from dancing it with Fonseca. Thank God, Tarot had had the sense to keep away from her, but he was bound to come to the party, was bound, like the rest of the gentlemen, to drink a great deal of everything from champagne to whisky punch ... After that, anything might happen ... 'Let's not have it,' she went on hurriedly. 'The gentlemen paw one's gown so! And their hands not always of the cleanest!'

'Very well. But don't be surprised if you hear yourself accused of setting up for a prude!'

She tossed her head in a familiar gesture of Josephine's. 'Who cares for that?'

But, alone, she sat down to write one of Josephine's own perfumed little notes, to be sent off, by hand to Monsieur

Tarot. As an old friend, she said, she was hurt that he had let a whole week pass without calling.

It brought him within half an hour, and, mercifully, she was alone to receive him. 'You sent for me, *ma mie?*' He kissed her hand. 'You have relented? Thought again?'

'I think of nothing else.' It was true enough. 'And the more I think, the more I see that we must be practical, you and I.' Alone with him, it was easier, and safer, to speak French. 'There is something you need to know. There was a Monsieur Fonseca, here in Savannah.' She paused, uncertain how to go on, and he interrupted her.

'Who sleeps now, in the graveyard across there. Naturally, I have heard of him. Monsieur the husband's first and only duel. And a dead shot, they tell me.' His smile froze the marrow of her bones. 'Do you remember holding the candles for me to snuff with my pistol, *ma petite?*'

There was no need to feign a shudder. 'That's just why I sent for you,' she took her cue. 'To make sure you know that if Hyde dies his entire fortune goes to a disagreeable cousin in Charleston and I am left to eke out existence on a widow's pittance.'

His smile was patronising now. 'You really think I had not discovered that for myself? Do you imagine Monsieur Purchis would be alive now if I had not? You underestimate me, *ma chère.*' He sighed, and picked up hat, gloves and cane. 'Might it not have been better to pretend that some of your concern was for me? "The Constant Couple", *parbleu.*' He quoted Hyde's words at the theatre with a controlled fury that frightened her more than anything else. 'Do you think I have not been tempted, daily, to make a widow of you?' He laughed. 'A widow!'

Cold sweat prickled at his tone. 'But a poor one.'

'Precisely. So have no fears for the rich husband. I shall be the perfect guest tonight. You will see. And, tomorrow, I will call on you to recieve your first "gift". I shall have left my

gloves behind. So careless! But you, in your goodness, will have them ready packed up for me, in a neat little parcel. With the sapphire necklace inside.'

'I said the earrings.'

'And I say the necklace.' Their eyes met, cold and steady, but it was hers that fell first.

'Very well. The necklace.' And Hyde wanted to retrench.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Tarot stayed stone cold sober throughout the party, and Juliet found this, curiously, almost more frightening than anything else he had done. William Jay, on the other hand, seemed to have acquired the American habit of indiscriminately mixing claret, champagne and various forms of whisky punch. Dancing the third quadrille with her he confided, with flushed indiscretion and a loud voice, his anxieties about Mr. Scarbrough and his builders. 'They've not been paid; they're beginning to complain. But what can I do, Mrs. Purchis?'

'Keep quiet about it, I should think.' Her answer came out more tart than she intended, but she had noticed for herself that Scarbrough had new lines in his face.

He was not the only one. Had it been a mistake not to provide a downstairs retreat for the men? As it was they tended to get together in little, anxious-looking, low-talking groups, and more than once she had to use her hostess's privilege to sweep down on them, break them up and ruthlessly find them all partners for the next dance. They did not, she thought, much like it, but, inevitably, they obeyed. After all, to them, she was Mrs. Purchis of Winchelsea.

Lord, how angry they would be if the imposture was ever discovered. It was a thought that haunted her these days. All very well, in a way, for her. She would be out of it all, nursing her memories, far away in France. But Hyde — what would it do to Hyde? No time for these thoughts. She looked about for the next thing to do, caught Tarot's eye and made him take her to the buffet for a glass of iced lemonade.

'A most delightful party.' His eyes were fixed on the sapphire necklace.

'Thank you.' Mechanically.

In fact, it seemed endless. She could hardly believe it when the musicians had packed up their instruments and the last guest kissed her hand and thanked her. Hyde was downstairs, seeing Mayor Wayne to his carriage. She was suddenly so tired she could hardly stand, but here was Anne appearing, as always, when needed. 'You'll look after the tidying up?'

'Naturally. Get you to your room, *petite*, you look worn out. I'll bring you some hot milk presently.'

She also brought Tarot's gloves, which she had retrieved from behind the potted palm where they had arranged he should leave them.

'Bless you, Anne, I don't know what I'd do without you.' Juliet looked up with a start as the boudoir door opened.

'A more successful party than I had hoped. My congratulations!' As Hyde entered the room, Juliet breathed a sigh of relief that Anne had had the wits to bring not only Tarot's gloves, but all the other trifles their guests had forgotten. He looked at the little pile, 'One can always tell how people have enjoyed themselves by the number of fans, and gloves and reticules they leave behind. You will have a busy day tomorrow giving all these back.'

'It looks like it. But it was a good party, was it not? Even without any waltzes?' It was the last one she would ever give for him and she found herself absurdly anxious for his praise.

'Perfect. If only young Jay had stayed sober. I was grateful to you for silencing him so effectively, my dear.'

'Bless me, Hyde, did you hear that? I sometimes think you positively ubiquitous.' And that, she told herself crossly, was a word Josephine would never have used in a thousand years.

'Where you are concerned, I would like to be.' Hyde had apparently noticed nothing out of the way. 'But you look fagged out. I'm a selfish brute to keep you a moment longer from your bed.'

The morning proved him a true prophet. The house was thronged with callers, and the parcel for Tarot, with its fortune in jewellery tucked tidily inside the right hand glove, was merely one of many Juliet handed over to their owners. 'You'll be careful.' It was all she had a chance to say to him.

'I am always careful.' He smiled that unnerving smile of his. 'I am come to pay my adieus for a few days. I am off to Charleston this afternoon. It is a town I have longed to revisit. But naturally I shall return for the festivities next week. I shall look forward to seeing you then, Mrs. Purchis.'

'Yes.' Smiling mechanically, registering that he meant to have the earrings next week, she was filled with terror lest he encounter Josephine in Charleston. And yet what more sensible than that he should take the necklace and dispose of it there?

Meanwhile, the preparations for receiving President Monroe were going on apace. The pavilion in Johnson Square was almost finished, and William Jay could talk of nothing else. The *Savannah* too, was undergoing a drastic springcleaning. The President was to be taken for a trip downriver on her, to Tybee Island.

'And Scarbrough?' Juliet asked Hyde.

'Is turning his new house upside-down ready for the President. And looking worse every day. I shall be glad when this state visit is over.'

'And so shall I.' But would she? Every time she saw the *Savannah*, lying quietly at anchor below the bluff, she faced, all

over again, the probability that when the steamship left for Europe, she would be on her, with everything over. Curious how much worst of all it was that she would not even be able to say good-bye to Hyde. Josephine would come back, any day now. And she must disappear without a word. Cinderella at midnight, but forever. She might as well die. Going over the *Savannah* with Hyde, she had wondered in which of those elegantly furnished staterooms she would cry out her heart.

* * *

'Are you as tired as I am?' Hyde picked up the bezique pack and shuffled expertly. It was the evening before the President's arrival, and they had spent all morning touring the route he was to take, from the bluff, where he would be saluted by the cannon George Washington had given the city and review the Savannah Volunteer Guards, by way of Johnson Square and William Jay's pavilion to Scarbrough's house.

'Tireder, if possible.' Juliet glanced idly at the hand he had dealt her. 'But at least you look better, however tired.' It was her one comfort. She had had a letter from Josephine that morning, from Charleston. A quick scrawl, written as the *Liberty* docked, it had warned Juliet to be ready to change places at a moment's notice. 'I'm not going to miss the President's visit.' When she wrote it, Josephine had not had Juliet's letter, which would have been awaiting her in Legare Street. But it could only speed her coming. Juliet swallowed convulsively. Whatever happened to her, she must not let Hyde be exposed to the appalling scandal that would explode about them if Josephine mismanaged her return. And yet, what more could she do to protect him? On her instructions, Alice and Anne had warned the servants to be ready for anything. Their kind, sad faces told her that they would do their best, for Hyde and for her, if not for Josephine.

'Devil take it!' Hyde's unwonted imprecation betrayed his

own state of tension. 'The front door bell. At this hour! Yes, what is it, Moses?'

'Mr. Scarbrough would be glad of a word with you, sir. He says he's sorry it's so late, but it won't keep.'

'Oh, very well, Moses, show him in.'

'Here, sir? He said it was private, and most urgent.'

'Of course, here.' Impatiently. 'I've nothing private from Mrs. Purchis.'

But Scarbrough, entering, was visibly taken aback by the sight of the two of them, sitting facing each other across the card table.

Juliet, on the other hand, was delighted to see him, as, deep in her own thoughts, she had forgotten her role and was beating Hyde soundly, using the method her father had taught her. 'Mr. Scarbrough,' she rose and held out her hand. 'What news in town?'

'None that I know of.' If he had looked fagged out before, now he looked desperate. 'I'm this moment returned from Charleston. There were a few last minute purchases for the house. You will forgive me, ma'am?' He turned to Hyde. 'If I could have one word alone with you?'

'Nonsense,' said Hyde. 'There is no crisis so bad that Mrs. Purchis can't share it.'

Scarbrough's tired face flushed darkly. 'I hope you're right!' He reached into hs coat pocket. 'There's your crisis!' The gold and sapphire necklace fell like a glittering snake across the cards. 'I saw it in a jeweller's in Charleston. There could be no mistaking it.'

'I hope you contrived not to pay more for it than it is worth.' Hyde's cool voice brought him a look of amazement from Juliet.

'If you want to know, I got it dirt cheap. Well, there it is. And I wish you joy of it. It was sold by a Frenchman, the jeweller told me.'

'Well,' said Hyde reasonably, 'of course it was, since I gave it

to him. I'm only sorry to hear he got such a poor price for it. As for you, Scarbrough, I must thank you for your kind intentions, and reimburse you. I'm sorry, my dear,' he turned to Juliet, 'that your white elephant is returned to you so quickly.'

'Never mind.' Juliet swallowed astonishment, picked up her cue and touched the necklace disdainfully. 'After all, it has a certain charm, in a vulgar kind of way.'

Hyde laughed. 'Perhaps you had better wear it to entertain President Monroe after all, my dear. In the meantime, come to my study, Scarbrough, and tell me what I owe you.'

Left alone, Juliet sat transfixed, desperate, racking her brains for a way out of this disaster. Nothing for it, that she could see, but to admit to being blackmailed by Tarot, but what in the world should she say he was blackmailing her *about*? What, for Josephine's sake, was the least she could admit? But there was worse than that. What could she tell Hyde that would not send him out to fight another duel; this time with a man who snuffed candles with his pistol?

'Thinking of a new set of lies for me,' Hyde's cheerful voice from the doorway made her start convulsively. 'Don't you think it's time we rang down the curtain and called an end to the play?'

She put a bewildered hand to her brow. 'Rang down the curtain? I don't believe I quite follow you, my dear.'

His laugh was bafflingly normal. 'Well, that makes a change, considering what a dance you have been leading me. Not that I haven't enjoyed it, of course. It's been a pleasure to watch you, and, if I may say so, to lend a hand here and there.'

'Lend a hand? Hyde, what are you talking about? Have you gone crazy?'

'No.' He settled himself comfortably in the chair across the table from her and picked up the sapphire necklace. 'That's just what I'm telling you. That I'm not quite the fool you think. Did you never consider — ' He paused for a long moment,

smiling — 'Juliet, that my wife might have told me about her cousin who might have been her twin?'

'Oh!' Her hand went up to her mouth. 'You mean you knew?'

'From the first. Well,' he conceded the point. 'Almost from the first. Another time you plan such a substitution there are a few simple hazards you should consider. You did not think, for instance, how my wife loves to drench herself in chypre. Any time I was in doubt as to which of my charmers was entertaining me, I had only, if you will forgive the vulgarism, to smell her. A hand . . . a handkerchief . . . I could tell in an instant.'

'And you let it go on?'

'I'm afraid so. Shocking of me, I know, but it is not often that such an entertainment provides itself in a man's life.'

'"Entertainment"!' She did not know whether to laugh or cry. 'You can call it that?' She was bewildered in a throng of discoveries, recollections, reconsiderations ... 'And Fonseca?'

He was sober on the instant. 'Yes. You have a right to ask that. I beg you to believe, Juliet, that I knew things about him — quite apart from his relationship with my wife — that made me feel justified. The law could never have touched him. He was a slave dealer, you know. I could tell you things . . . But I won't. At all events, they made it possible for me to do what I did. Well —' reasonably, 'it was obvious that his return from Florida would be the end of our play.'

'So you killed him? Hyde, you frighten me.'

'Believe me, I frightened myself. I did not know how unpleasant I would find it to have killed a man — even such as Fonseca. Do you know, since we are talking frankly at last, I was really quite glad that he wounded me. Quite aside, of course, from the pleasure of being nursed by you.'

'Good God!' There was no end to this confusion of recollections and re-appraisals. 'That time when you got worse —'

'Well, of course,' he said. 'I wanted you back. There seemed no other way. Mind you, it worked rather better than I intended.'

'It nearly killed you.'

'But not quite. No need to look so stricken, my—' He paused. 'What a remarkable situation! Will you forgive me if I follow habit and continue to call you "my dear"? Juliet is the prettiest name in the world, but I don't think I dare start using it yet.'

'Yet? You mean, you intend to go on?'

'Well,' he said, 'that depends, of course, on where Josephine is and what she is doing. You do see, don't you, that you must tell me?'

'Yes.' For the moment, all she had time to feel was an overwhelming relief. 'It's not so bad as you may, perhaps, think.' Hideous even to guess at what he might be imagining about Josephine. She hurried into the story of the proposed rescue of Napoleon and found herself actually almost enjoying his amazed expression.

'Well, I'll be damned,' he said when she had finished. And then, 'Forgive me. I've never been so surprised in my life. I owe Josephine a thousand apologies. Only, it changes everything. You do see, don't you, how it changes everything?'

'No.' Why was he, all of a sudden, so grimly serious? 'I don't understand you.'

'You really don't.' There was something, now, in his steady gaze that kept her dumb. 'What did you plan, tell me, for the end of this charade?'

'Why—' Tears filled her throat but she fought them down. 'Josephine promised . . . She would pay my fare back to France . . . I was to disappear . . .'

'You needed the money so badly? I always wondered how she contrived to persuade you.'

'Badly! I was starving when she found me. But there was more to it than that.' At all costs, she must make him under-

stand. 'I thought — forgive me — I thought Josephine desperately unhappy. She needed to do something, to achieve something . . .'

'You were right enough.' He was looking beyond her, sombrely, into the corner of the room. 'She was miserable. She always had been. With me. Don't you see, my — Juliet? When she disappeared and you came to play my good angel, I thought she had found someone, found some kind of happiness at last.'

'Oh.' It left her speechless.

'Now,' savagely, 'now do you begin to see what a wretch I feel? Don't you understand? I let you play out your little drama, thinking all the time that somewhere, somehow, Josephine had found a man she could love. And,' he clenched his teeth on it, 'was giving me grounds for divorce.'

'Divorce!' But one violent movement on his part had thrown table, cards, sapphire necklace and all broadcast across the room. His arms were round her, pulling her to her feet, his lips found hers. She did not even think of resisting. Why should she? There would be time enough for despair, tomorrow. Why not this moment of poisoned happiness tonight?

He let her go at last, suddenly. 'I knew you felt it too, My love. Let me say it this once. Don't look so frightened. I'll not touch you again. I don't dare. But, oh my God, what madness made me fall in love with Josephine — with your shadow?'

'I'm not frightened,' she said. 'Let tomorrow take care of itself. Tonight, I don't care what happens to me.'

'But I do. My one and only love. Don't let me have more on my conscience than I must. More of despair . . .' He put her, with a kind of fierce gentleness, back in her chair and sat down facing but well away from her. 'So you're to disappear?'

'Yes.' She managed, almost, to match the desperate calmness of his tone. 'I had thought of the *Savannah*.'

'I remember. You were close to tears when we went over her. I wondered at the time. You were choosing your stateroom?'

'Yes.' How much he had noticed, and how little she had understood.

'And Josephine will probably be back tomorrow.' He looked at it squarely. 'Well, of course she will. To entertain the President. But this man Tarot. What was there between them, do you think?'

'God knows,' She would not guess. 'But you're right: she will be back tomorrow. I've heard from her.'

'It makes no difference anyway.' He followed his own line of thought. 'What there was between them, it was all before . . . before I married her. Let's face it, my love, honestly, like the fellow conspirators we are. She will be back tomorrow, you say, and suddenly, on a breath, at a street corner, very likely in full public view, we will have to say good-bye for ever. So let me tell you now, once and for all, that whatever happens, I shall never forget you. I almost wish I thought I could.' He was nearer again, and had hold of both her hands. 'You've taught me so much. But so has Josephine. It's a crazy plan, hers, and of course I won't let her go through with it and let loose that madman on Europe once again, but I can't help respecting her for it. There's more to her than I ever understood.' He sighed, lifted her hands to kiss them, one after the other, then let them go. 'Nothing for it but to try again, with all the loving you have taught me. Who knows? In a scrambling, second-best kind of way, we may make some kind of a miserable marriage of it yet. But you, my poor love, what's to become of you?'

'I shall go back to Europe on the *Savannah.* What else can I do?'

'Nothing.' He faced it with her. 'Our *Comedy of Errors* has turned tragedy after all. I could almost think it a judgment on me for poor Fonseca. Oh, Juliet,' suddenly, heart-rendingly, he broke down, 'how shall I manage without you? How shall I bear it?'

'How shall I?'

'If you could only stay — if we could meet sometimes . . .'

'No! Hyde, you must see, that would be worst of all. Besides, if I did, the story would be bound to get out, sooner or later. Think of the scandal.'

'What do I care for that? It's you I'm thinking about. Going back, alone, to France. I'll see to it, of course, that you never want, but what comfort is that? Shall I come with you, Juliet?'

For a moment, her heart sang. Then she remembered everything: Winchelsea, the servants, Aunt Abigail . . . 'You know you can't.'

'Do I?' She watched him face it. 'Yes, I suppose I do.'

'Besides, you'd be wretched away from Savannah. And so shall I.' She could not help adding it. 'I had not realised how I had grown to love it.' She smiled at him through a mist of tears. 'You see, it's not just you.'

'As if that was any comfort. Oh, my poor darling, what will you *do*?'

'God knows. But there will be time to think of something, on the *Savannah*. I know you won't let me starve. Not that I care much. I shan't go back to France,' she added. 'I couldn't bear that. Not now. Not after this. England, perhaps?'

'Stay here! My cousin has a house he never uses. In Charleston, down on one of the creeks. You can row right up to the door. You could live there, as quiet as you pleased. I could come to you . . . sometimes.'

'Hyde!' She looked at him somewhere between tears and laughter, 'I do believe you are offering me a *carte blanche*.'

He took her hands. 'I do believe I am.'

'You know the answer as well as I do: No!' He was pulling her towards him. 'Hyde! I can't stand any more. Let me go now. Think of tomorrow.'

'Yes,' he said grimly. 'We had better.'

* * *

Morning brought no sign of Josephine, so it was Juliet who stood on the bluff with Hyde, watching President Monroe's boat rowed briskly over from the Carolina shore, to the sound of salutes first from the revenue cutter *Dallas*, and then from the wharf and George Washington's cannon on the bluff. She had, afterwards, only the vaguest memories of being introduced to the lanky, blue-eyed President of the United States and his Secretary of War John C. Calhoun from South Carolina. She watched, through tear-dimmed eyes, as the President reviewed the Savannah Volunteer Guards, drawn up along the bluff, resplendent in their new scarlet and blue uniforms, and then mounted on horseback to ride along West Broughton Street to Mr. Scarbrough's house.

She supposed she must have said the proper things to all her friends, gathered together for this gay occasion. Strange and desolating to realise, suddenly, just how many friends she had, here in Savannah . . . But Hyde was pressing her arm. In warning? How odd, how delicious, how wretched it was to have him, all of a sudden, her accomplice in the charade. 'Time to be looking for the carriage,' he said, 'if we are to reach West Broad Street in time for the President's address. You would not want to miss that?'

'No indeed.' They were in the thick of their friends: No time now for tears.

'I told Charon to wait for us in Johnson Square,' he said. 'I knew you wouldn't mind walking that far.'

Had she slept at all the night before? She was glad of his supporting arm across the grassy bluff and the loose, sinking sand of Bay Street and along Bull to Johnson Square, where Charon was waiting with carriage and horses comfortably tucked into the shade of a blossoming Pride of India Tree. How like Hyde to have thought of that.

'Any news, Charon?' was Hyde's first question, as he helped her up into the carriage.

'None, sir,' Juliet had half-expected, had nerved herself to

find Josephine waiting, angrily, in the carriage. Surely she would not be long behind her letter?

'Then we had best get along to Mr. Scarbrough's house,' said Hyde. 'Mr. Jay's pavilion looks fine, does it not?'

'Yes.' She looked at the huge temporary building through blurred eyes. The ball for Monroe was to be held there five days hence, on the last day of his visit. She would undoubtedly be in hiding by then. At Winchelsea, they had decided last night, so at least she would see the beloved place again.

West Broad Street was much more crowded than the bluff had been. Rich and poor, black and white, carriage parties, horsemen and pedestrians thronged the wide street. Gay little black boys flowered in the trees and Charon had to pull his horses up short to avoid running over one who had suddenly decided to improve his position.

'What do you think?' asked Hyde. 'Do you want to get out and try and fight your way through to the house?'

'No. Let's stay here, shall we?' Why waste a precious moment alone with him, even if they were alone in the midst of a crowd.

'Too late anyway,' he said. 'Look, there he comes.' The President had appeared on the upstairs balcony of Mr. Jay's handsome new house and the crowd had gone wild. 'Time enough to see Mr. Scarbrough's house tonight at the dinner,' said Hyde. 'I hope.'

'Yes.' She hardly knew, now, what she hoped. Would it not be best to have it all over, to be on her way to Winchelsea, and exile? Mr. Monroe was speaking, saying all the inevitable things, about friendship between north and south . . . the great bond of union . . . She let it wash over her head and hardly even noticed when it was over and the cheering broke out again, louder than ever. Mr. Scarbrough was on the balcony now, with the President. 'He looks wretched,' she turned to Hyde.

'Almost the way I feel,' he said. 'Yes. Things are bad with

him, I'm afraid.' His laugh grated. 'All the kinder of him to buy that wretched necklace.'

'Wretched, yes.' She turned to him impulsively. 'But I'm so glad he did. Do you know, the worst thing of all, before, was knowing I would have to go without saying good-bye to you. Now, at least, we have had this.'

'This!' He turned to speak to Charon. 'Let's get out of here. As fast as you safely can.' And then, his hand on hers. 'You think this one day can make up for a lifetime of loneliness?'

'Well,' she said. 'It will have to, won't it?'

'Yes.' His teeth grated on it. 'And, do you know, I have the strangest feeling that when we get home we will find Josephine there. Monroe's was not the only boat that crossed from the Carolina side, did you notice? Charon! Take us round by the Jewish graveyard. It's the only quiet place I can think of,' he turned to explain.

'Hyde, should we?'

'Why not? Why should a devoted husband not take his wife for a refreshing turn after such a morning of crowds and confusion? And at least,' he smiled down at her, 'today we should not happen on any young bloods duelling there.'

'Yes, but Hyde — '

'Hush! A wife's duty is to obey her husband, and I propose, this once, to stand upon my rights.'

And yet, when they got to the quiet walled plot on the edge of the town where its thriving Jewish community buried their dead, there seemed to be nothing to say. They took one silent turn among the oleanders and the neat marble and granite gravestones, his arm warm on hers. Then she looked up at him pleadingly. 'It's no use, Hyde. Let's go back. Let's get it over with.'

Charon was still slowing his horses outside the house in Oglethorpe Square when Pete came running out. 'She's here, sir.'

'I knew it.' Juliet gripped Hyde's arm.

'It could be worse.' His hand was reassuring on hers for a moment. 'At least, this day of all days, we should be safe from visitors. Where is she, Pete?'

'In your — ' he spoke to Juliet, looked confused, and began again. 'In her room. Locked in, and mad as hops,' he confided, ' 'count of Anne and Alice have both took themselves off to see the doings. She came in the back way, through our quarters.' It amused him. 'She's given orders, ma'am, that you're to come up to her the minute you get back. Without the master knowing.'

'Just so.' Hyde had leapt down and now turned to help Juliet alight. 'Let us go upstairs and surprise her, shall we?'

'Hyde — ' She hung back. 'Just like that?'

'How else?' His grip hurt her arm. 'Come, my dear. Mrs. Richardson is probably watching us from her parlour window.'

In the house, Juliet was aware of the stir of excitement. Far more servants than usual were loitering in the hall and downstairs rooms. They all knew. They were all waiting for the inevitable scene. 'What's all this?' Hyde's voice, unwontedly angry, sent them scurrying. 'Moses. You will stay here and see that nobody whatever is admitted. Not the President himself.'

'No, sir.' Moses drew himself up. 'Over my dead body, sir.'

'I hope it won't come to that. After you, my dear.'

Juliet trembled convulsively as she led the way up the curving stairway. Even in her own wretchedness, she found herself horribly sorry for Josephine, the only person in the house who did not know what had happened. 'Shan't I go first?' she turned to plead with Hyde. 'And prepare her?'

'No.' His face was set. 'She began this. She must see it through.'

No use to stand there arguing. Juliet tapped on the closed door of her room. 'Jo, let me in.'

'And about time too.' Josephine must have heard the carriage draw up. She flung open the door as if she had been waiting behind it, then paused, open-mouthed, at sight of Hyde. 'You!' And then, viciously, to Juliet, 'Traitor.'

'Calmly, my dear.' Hyde ushered Juliet into the room and relocked the door behind her. 'Let us not make more of a Roman holiday for the servants than need be.'

'You mean they know? You've told them too?' Josephine's glittering gaze was all for Juliet. 'And curried favour with them, as I well know. Gifts for the children! Sugar for the old! Don't think I haven't seen what you were trying to do. And as if that was not enough, now, I take it, you have told my husband God knows what kind of a lying tale. Well!' she sat down in a flurry of taffeta, 'so much for our bargain. You can work your passage home for all of me.'

'Sit down.' Hyde's reassuring arm had sustained Juliet throughout this tirade. Now he placed her, firmly, in a chair across the room from her cousin and stood, himself, leaning against the chimney-piece, between them. 'As for you,' he turned to Josephine. 'There are a few things you need to know. First, your cousin has never betrayed you. I saw through the trick all the time.'

'You what?' She could not believe her ears.

'I must say,' his tone was tolerant. 'I'm surprised at you, Josephine. That your cousin should have thought me so gullible is understandable enough. After all, she had never met me. But what in the world made you think me such a fool? No —' He threw up a hand. 'Don't tell me. I think it's best I should not know. After all, like it or not, we have our life to lead together, you and I.'

'Ah!' Some of the tension went out of Josephine. 'At least you admit that.'

'Well, of course. We married, did we not, for better, for worse? There is nothing about this crazy scheme of yours to release me from the bond.'

'More's the pity?' Angry colour burned through her rouge. 'Don't think I've not known what was going on between you two. But what I'm doing is more important than any of us. It's not a crazy scheme,' she turned her rage, now, on Hyde. 'It's going to work. I've got my ship. I've got my crew waiting at Charleston. Nothing is going to stop me.'

'Oh yes it is,' said Hyde mildly. 'I am.'

'You? How?'

'You can take your choice. By laying information against you, if you push me to it. Our government, you know, is on friendly terms with Louis XVIII. They would never allow of such a venture setting forth from one of our ports.'

'And you'd do that. To me?'

'If you make me. You must see that I would infinitely prefer to let the whole mad project dwindle into the moonshine it really is.'

'Mad! Moonshine!' She was almost beside herself. 'And you — ' she turned back to Juliet. 'I suppose I have you to thank for convincing him that my plan is mad.'

'I wish you would allow me the use of my own intellect,' said Hyde wearily. 'Of course it's mad. I don't know what kind of captain you've got for your ship — the *Liberty*, is she? Nor what kind of crew. But just assume them capable of finding their way to St. Helena, how do they propose to free Napoleon from his guards? And, if they do, how could they possibly get him safe back to Europe, where, frankly, I think he would be most unwelcome, even in France. No, no, my dear Josephine, I fear you must give up this idea of yours, though. I confess I cannot help respecting you for what you have done. So: here's a bargain: give it up; I will forget the trick you have played on me. Juliet, who is nothing if not generous, will forgive you the foolish things you have said — '

'And do what?' Josephine's voice was still dangerous.

'I sail on the *Savannah*,' said Juliet.

'Her expenses paid by me,' put in Hyde.

'As well they might be!' Juliet quailed at the fury in Josephine's voice. 'I'm not quite a fool,' she went on, 'though you two choose to think me so. Suppose I choose to divorce you, sir, on the evidence before my eyes?'

Juliet's heart gave a great leap. Her eyes met Hyde's. 'Nothing,' he said, 'would please me more. We may have to fabricate the evidence, it's true, but if you are agreeable, my love,' to Juliet, 'I certainly am.'

'So it's come to this.' Josephine spoke through her teeth. 'Purchis of Winchelsea will be dragged through the courts . . . My God, what a scandal that would be for the old Savannah harpies! Lord, it's tempting. But, no,' she flashed a glittering, vengeful glance from one to the other. 'I wouldn't dream of doing that to you, Hyde. Of course I take your word that nothing has happened between you of which even Aunt Abigail would not approve. In fact,' her voice rose a note, 'I actually believe you! It's just like you two. So — there is nothing in the way of our happy ending.' She held out a graceful hand to Hyde. 'If I have said anything you did not quite like, remember the strangeness of my situation, and forgive me. And as for you,' she turned to Juliet, 'I suppose it is my own fault if you have proved a more adequate substitute than I intended. But, now, the substitution is over. When does the *Savannah* sail?'

'Not until about May 20th.' Hyde answered her, his voice absolutely devoid of feeling. 'We had decided, Juliet and I, that she should spend the intervening week or so at Winchelsea. Safest so.'

'Yes. And the sooner she gets there the better. You'll tell Aunt Abigail?'

'No,' Hyde answered. 'It would kill her. Juliet will have to hide in the old wing. I hope you understand what you have done to her, Josephine?'

'I believe I am beginning to.' No mistaking the satisfaction in Josephine's voice.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

'Perhaps I might have the use of my own room?' Josephine's glittering gaze travelled from Hyde to Juliet. 'It's time I thought of changing for Mr. Scarbrough's party. Best if you help me, Juliet? This is the safest place for you, I suppose, until it is dark enough to leave for Winchelsea. Is my green silk fit to be worn? I feel in a mood for emeralds.'

'Of course it is.' Juliet moved over to the bedroom door, as much to hide her anger as to obey the implied command. 'Alice has seen to that,' she added over her shoulder.

'Alice! I won't have her anywhere near me. I warn you, Hyde, we'll have to make a clean sweep of the servants. I collect, from their behaviour today that they are all in the know. I'm not having them here to gossip and titter behind my back about what's happened.'

'No?' Juliet knew, if Josephine did not, how near Hyde was to losing control. 'Before we discuss that, there is something we have forgotten to tell you. You are being blackmailed.'

'Blackmailed? I?' No question about her amazement. 'But what in the world about?'

'That is precisely what we do not know, and why Juliet felt it necessary to hand over your sapphire necklace to the blackmailer.'

'My sapphires! You did that!' She looked ready to fly at Juliet.

'Control yourself! It's safe back.' He moved into the alcove where the jewel box stood.

'*Enfin!*' All three of them swung round at the voice from the window. Standing there, in the entrance to the wide second-

storey verandah, Tarot could see only Josephine, since Hyde was concealed by the alcove and Juliet by the bedroom door. 'Denied even to me,' he went on mock reproachfully. 'I'm too old for this Romeo-trick of window climbing.' And then, '*Mon Diu*, 'Phine!' He caught her as she fainted.

For a few moments he was too busy laying Josephine on her *chaise longue* and chafing her hands to notice the other two occupants of the room, who gazed at each other, speechless. Then, 'Her smelling salts,' said Hyde.

'Yes.' Juliet withdrew into the bedroom, found the little bottle and returned to hold it to her cousin's nose while Tarot supported her in his arms and called on her, with many a French endearment, to pull herself together. He took the bottle from Juliet's hand without a glance, and waved it under Josephine's nose.

'I never meant to frighten you, *chèrie*.' And then, taking in, belatedly, what he had heard, he looked back over his shoulder at Hyde. '*Tiens*, the husband.'

'Just so,' said Hyde.

Tarot shrugged. 'Time for you later, monsieur. But why she should faint now, my lion-hearted Josephine, is more than I can comprehend. Some burnt feathers, perhaps?' He looked up, at last, at Juliet. 'By God!' Was it the measure of his amazement that he spoke in English? Then down at Josephine, still lifeless on his arm. '*Nom d'un nom* . . .' And back to Juliet. 'It was you, all the time.'

'Yes,' said Hyde. 'But before we come to explanations, I really think it might be worth trying burnt feathers. An old fan, perhaps?'

'No need.' Juliet had been watching her cousin. 'She is beginning to stir. The smelling salts a little closer, sir. They're not something I use much myself. They may not be of the freshest.'

'Two of you.' He moved the bottle more closely under Josephine's nose but kept his eyes, now, on Juliet. 'So like and yet—'.

'So unlike,' Hyde finished it for him.

'Ah.' A slight movement turned all his attention to Josephine. 'She's coming to. Lie still, my little love. I have you safe.' And then, across her to Juliet. '*Peste!* No wonder you did not fall into my arms, as I expected. My apologies, madame, though I confess I do not quite understand . . .'

'No more do we,' said Hyde. 'Who are you, sir?'

A look, almost comic, doubt visible, played across his face, then he came to a decision. '*Rien ne va plus*,' he said. 'The game's over.' He looked down at Josephine, who was breathing more easily, laid her gently back among velvet pillows and rose to his feet. 'Claude Hercule Simon de Joinville, M'sieur, and entirely at your service.'

'Enchanted.' Hyde sounded puzzled.

'*Tiens*,' he slipped back into French. 'I might have known, the little devil. She did not tell you about me?'

'Not a word. What should she have?'

Josephine stirred, put a hand to her brow, and pulled herself up among the cushions. 'What happened?' And then, on a note Juliet had never heard before, 'Claude! It's true! I wasn't dreaming: you're alive!'

'Well, naturally, if a trifle the worse for wear after three long years in Russia. You despair too easily, *ma mie*. At least — ' He looked from her to Juliet, then back to Hyde. 'Forgive me, sir, but which one is your wife?'

'Josephine.' Hyde's voice was toneless.

'She's not, you know, she's mine.' And, as the silence lengthened, he bent down, pulled Josephine into his arms and kissed her roundly to prove it.

Over their heads, Hyde's eyes met Juliet's in a long, deep exchange. 'So that's it,' he said at last. And, to Tarot-Joinville, 'No wonder you thought you had a likely subject for blackmail.'

'*Touché*.' Very gently, Joinville put Josephine back among her cushions. 'Believe me, monsieur, I would much rather have my wife.'

'Or best of all, perhaps, both?'

He laughed. 'You're right, of course. We've always lived by our wits, my Josephine and I. In so far as we have had an "always". And, do you know, sir, I begin to think there is hope for us yet.' His bright, intelligent eye travelled from Hyde to Juliet and back. 'Silence is golden, *n'est ce pas*?'

'It is indeed,' Hyde's voice was dry. 'But, before she comes fully to herself, perhaps I should tell you what your wife has been busy about.'

'Your wife too,' reminded Joinville.

'Precisely. Our mutual problem. Do you know, I find myself delighted to meet you, sir. I am glad to know that it is your charm, not my lack of it, that made my marriage to your wife so disastrous a failure. However,' Joinville had been about to interrupt, but he held up a hand for silence, 'you do need to know what she has been doing to console herself for her disappointment in me.'

'Yes.' Joinville's smile could be surprisingly charming. 'Nothing my little devil does can really surprise me. You should have seen her when we first met. But this is no time to be indulging in reminiscences. As you so justly observe — ' Settled beside her on the sofa, he gathered Josephine into a still firmer embrace, 'while she is, miraculously, still silent, I had best know what she has been doing.'

'Just trying to free Napoleon from St. Helena, that's all.'

'To free Napoleon! *Tais toi!*' Josephine had sat up and tried to speak. 'Have you run mad, *ma mie*? If you could do it, which I doubt, he'd be hissed out of France, the poor man. No, no, that dream's over. We must think of a new one, you and I.' His speculative eye was fixed on Hyde. 'I think I begin to see it take shape already.'

'I'm sure you do,' said Hyde. 'But perhaps I should warn you that Josephine has spent most if not all of the large sum I settled on her when we were "married". On a ship.'

'To fetch Napoleon! What a little idiot.' And then, with a

flashing upward glance at Juliet, 'My congratulations, madame, you had me entirely convinced you were dependent for every *sou* on your husband.'

'Well, so I was,' said Juliet reasonably. 'Since I could not very well forge Josephine's signature to get at her bank account.' And then, 'Good gracious, Hyde! You had realised that too. That's why you gave me money, let me win at cards . . .'

'Well, of course.' He brought forward a chair for her. 'I said you had underestimated me, you two. But, come, there is a great deal to be decided, and very little time. My wife and I must appear at Mr. Scarbrough's dinner for the President.'

Josephine pulled herself out of Joinville's arms. 'I must start changing at once!' And then 'Oh, my God!'

'Precisely. You are beginning to see, at last, how the case is altered. I take it there is no question about your marriage, Joinville?'

'Not the least in the world. Religious and civil. I was taking no chances, in that chaos before Waterloo.'

'So — ' Josephine looked from one to the other with large eyes.

'You're a bigamist, my dear,' said Hyde. 'I don't rightly know what the penalty is . . . Some term of imprisonment, I expect. Judge James would be able to tell us. He will undoubtedly be at the dinner tonight.'

'But you won't — you wouldn't — '

'No. At least, not if you are reasonable.'

'And that means?'

'That you disappear, as you had intended Juliet to do. I am sure we can leave the details in the capable hands of your husband. Oh' — as an afterthought — 'I was sorry to hear you got so poor a price for the sapphire necklace, Joinville.'

Joinville spread out his hands in a deprecatory gesture. 'You know everything, it seems. Yes, he did me, that miserable Scot; he smelled something odd about the whole business from the start.' He laughed. 'This has been a mismanaged affair

throughout. Frankly, I'm ashamed of myself. Can I be losing my touch?'

'No, no,' said Hyde soothingly. 'You could hardly be expected to allow for twins. I take it Josephine did not tell you, as she did me?'

'We had other things to talk about. But the devil of it is,' he and Hyde were addressing each other almost like old friends by now, 'you see me before you penniless, or as near as makes no difference. And you —' he turned with loving fury on Josephine, 'you must go and squander a fortune on a ship. What in the world are we to do with a ship?'

'I think you had best sell it to me,' said Hyde. 'That, with what remains of the future I settled on your wife should see you well started in life. In Europe, for choice.'

'In Europe, of course. I've always thought, had I but the capital, that I could make a fortune out of a gambling house. With a hostess to run the place, of course.' He smiled lovingly at Josephine. 'What do you say, my torment?'

'Oh, *yes*!' said Josephine. 'And we'll sail on the *Savannah*, as you meant to do, Juliet. It will be the greatest thing!'

'You'll do nothing of the kind,' said Hyde. 'You'll travel in complete secrecy and at your best speed, overland at least as far as Norfolk, better still to New York, and take ship from there. I'm not chancing some stray Savannahian spotting the resemblance at this eleventh hour and giving the game away!'

'The game!' Joinville slapped Josephine's thigh delightedly. 'You mean you intend to play it out! Sir, I salute you. How glad I am I decided not to call you out and kill you. You're positively a man after my own heart. You'll brazen it out here, with —'

'My wife.' Hyde's tone was quelling. 'As soon as I can make her so.' His smile melted Juliet's bones. 'Forgive me, my love, this must be the strangest proposal upon record.'

'And a pretty belated one at that,' said Josephine sharply. 'Not but what I'm glad, of course, that you intend to make an

honest woman of my cousin. Ouch!' Joinville had slapped her sharply on the cheek.

'You forget yourself,' he said. 'Apologise, at once.' And, to Hyde, 'My apologies too, sir, but it seems to me that you have let her get deplorably out of hand.'

Hyde had looked dangerous for a moment, but now he recovered himself and laughed ruefully. 'I can hardly boast that I ever had her *in* hand. I am only delighted to see that I can trust you to honour our bond.'

'Oh, yes,' said Joinville. 'She'll do what I tell her. Your apology, *'Phine.*'

'I'm sorry, Ju.' It came out sullenly, and with a little spiteful laugh, 'I should have known the two of you better. Such patterns of perfection.'

'That's enough,' said her husband.

'Quite enough.' Hyde looked at his watch. 'Time's passing. We must dress for Mr. Scarbrough's dinner. I suggest you two remain in my study until full dark. I'll give orders for you to be set across the river then. After that, I rely on your discretion, Joinville. One breath of scandal about this, whether it's your fault or not, and the deal is off. You will have to take the *Liberty* (Josephine's ship) for her dowry. But if all goes well, her price shall be paid to any agent you name — in New York, next month.'

'And my Frenchmen?' asked Josephine. 'My faithful followers?'

'Will disband themselves fast enough when they get no news of you. But still, if you like, and to make assurance doubly sure, you had best tell me how to get in touch with their leader. What did you call yourself, by the way?'

'Madame de Joinville, of course.'

'Well, that's something to be thankful for. 'Say good-bye to your cousin, Juliet.'

'And the expenses of the journey?' asked Joinville.

'I've funds in my study to cover that.'

'Please.' Juliet had risen from her chair to come forward and stand between Hyde and Josephine. 'Hyde?'

'Yes?'

'May we not give them the sapphires? It was almost a promise. And I'll never wear them.'

'They're yours,' said Hyde. 'Do what you like with them.'

'Here, then!' She hurried over to the alcove and fetched the leather box. 'Think of me sometimes, Jo, when you wear them?'

'Ju! I'm sorry!' Suddenly, they were both crying, their arms round each other in an embrace that wiped out the past.

'Write to me sometimes!'

'Of course I will.'

Hyde and Joinville exchanged a long glance, that said, more clearly than words, 'Women'!

'Time to be gone!' Hyde opened the boudoir door so suddenly that Alice and Anne fell into the room. Behind them, the staircase was lined with gawping black faces. For an instant, he was rigid with rage, then, almost mildly. 'What in the devil's name are you all doing here?'

'Satan saw him climb in,' explained Anne. 'We were waiting to make sure . . .'

'He didn't eat me alive? Then I can only thank you all kindly and point out that I am quite capable of taking care of myself. Now, scoot, the lot of you, and if one word of this night's work gets out, I'll flay every man jack of you, free or not.'

A roar of delighted laughter from the stairway saluted his words and convinced Juliet that they had managed to hear enough to know just how the land lay. Well, so much the simpler.

Suddenly, amazingly, she was alone with Anne and Alice. She drew a deep breath. 'We're likely to be late for Mr. Scarbrough's dinner,' she said. 'I'll wear the green, Alice, and the Winchelsea emeralds.'

* * *

With Anne and Alice both helping, she managed the change in ten minutes. 'Anne!' She was fastening the second emerald earring. 'See if Mr. Purchis is ready and can spare me a moment before we go.'

'Yes, ma'am.' Curiously, indefinably, something had changed in their relationship.

Hyde tapped on her door a few moments later, immaculate in evening dress. 'My dear!' He kissed her hand. And then, with a laugh, 'Did it never occur to you that you spent a most suspiciously short time on your toilette?'

'Oh!' She made a face at him. 'Must you go on convincing me that I'm a hopeless conspirator! But, Hyde, I wanted to see you . . . before we . . . before they go. You will make sure, won't you, that they have enough funds? Anne and Alice are sorting out a collection of gowns that won't be missed, but, really, everything should be Josephine's . . . Not just the sapphires . . . After all, it's not her fault — '

'No.' His smile was heart-warming. 'So much as our good fortune. If she married me without love, why, so, I now realise, did I her. It is not everyone who is so miraculously released. And after all, I owe it to her that I have found you. A debt beyond all possibility of payment. So — that's right, her shawl, Alice, we must be going — whatever the price of the *Liberty*, I have promised her an income for life — and shall see to it that it is safely tied up for her and her children.' He took her arm. 'We shall be poor, my love, comparatively speaking.'

'Poor! With you! But — ' they were in the hall now 'Hyde, may I not see her again? To say good-bye?'

'No.' He led her firmly downstairs. 'It's all been said. Besides, if you remember, we are scandalously late for dinner.' Moses flung open front door and Hyde ushered her down the steps to the waiting carriage. Helping her up, 'One thing,' he said.

'Yes?' Settling green silk skirts, she turned to look at him inquiringly.

'Drive on, Charon! As fast as you dare.' He turned back to smile at her. 'I must remind you, love, that so far as the world is concerned we are, at best, a modern couple, content each to go our own way.'

'Yes?' Puzzled.

'Well.' His smile was an embrace. 'If you look at me like that, I shall probably kiss you in public; the world will think us run mad, and may guess at our secret. Which, frankly, I would much rather keep hid.'

'Am I so obvious?'

'My darling, it shines out of you. I really think we had best invent a quarrel and play one more scene for our friends' benefit. Luckily, they will be too much occupied with the President to notice us much. And you, remember, are to act as hostess. Poor Scarbrough will be nearly out of his wits at our lateness. What quarrel, do you think, could have made us commit such a solecism?'

'I've lost my sapphires,' she suggested. 'And had to change at the last moment. Scarbrough will think you have impounded them for some reason connected with that mysterious sale. The rest of the world will think whatever it pleases. And you — ' she tapped his hand with her fan — 'you were such a tasteless boor as to suggest that I wear the Winchelsea emeralds with a blue dress. No wonder if we have quarrelled!'

'No indeed.' Charon was drawing his horses to a sweating halt at the porticoed front entrance to the Scarbrough house. 'That's right, Charon, no time to go in at the side. At least we're so late as to have missed the crowd.'

'Who are doubtless missing us,' said Juliet.

'My love.' Hyde held her, hard, as he lifted her down. 'There's been so little time. But you do know, don't you, how happy I am?'

She smiled up at him. 'I know how happy *I* am.' And then, on the high pitched note of a shrew. 'Well, of course we are late. What else did you expect?' She picked up her skirts with an

angry swish and began to mount the steps to the hospitably open front door.

'There you are, ma'am, and sir —' Scarbrough's butler had obviously been hovering there on the lookout for them. 'The master says to leave your things right here with me, if you please, and go on up. The President, he's here.' And indeed they could hear the strains of *Monroe's March* echoing down from above.

'Oh, very well,' said Juliet petulantly. 'I suppose if I must meet the President without even a chance to see that my curls are in place, I must. Here —' she handed the man her shawl, shook out her skirts, and turned to the curving stairway that led up to the principal rooms on the first floor.

It was like arriving at a theatre after the curtain had gone up. Above them, the buzz of conversation and the music; here, silence and emptiness, so that she actually had time, as she mounted the stair, to look up at the high ceiling, three floors above, where Mr. Jay had painted a huge, domed skylight with the stars of the midnight sky. 'It's a splendid house,' she turned for a moment to Hyde, forgetting their 'quarrel'.

'Yes, poor Scarbrough.' And then, to remind her, sharply, 'You will make your own apologies to the President.'

'Well, of course I shall! I'd rather be late than arrive looking a fright.' The words, angrily spoken, carried her into the ballroom. It was packed with people, but a lane opened at once to let them through to the far side, where the President was standing in a bower of evergreens, surrounded by his *entourage* and the town worthies. As usual, none of their wives were in the group. It made Juliet's part much easier. 'Mr. President,' she swept him a deep curtsy, 'before you even accept my apologies for our lateness, you must settle an argument between my husband and me.' A furious glance for Hyde, just behind her. 'He said you were of Irish descent, and I must wear green in your honour. I maintained you were Scots, and true blue was your

colour. Now, tell me' — another burning glance for Hyde — 'which of us was right?'

'Madam.' The President smiled down at her. 'You were right of course, but I cannot regret a mistake that has brought you to us looking so delightful.' He took her hand. 'They are waiting for us, I believe, to begin the dancing.'

Extraordinary to be here, sweeping her curtsy to the President and then to the man on the other side of her, waiting for the music to begin, looking down, for just a moment, to Hyde, half-way along the set, talking animatedly to Mrs. Broughton. What in the world could he be saying to her? What in the world did it matter? Later, when they got home, she would ask him. She let the slow, sure realisation of happiness flood through her. Tonight she should have been rowing down to Winchelsea and exile, the last, quick farewells said, the play ended, and forever. Die on the field of battle,' the rowers would have sung, 'Glory to my soul.'

And here she was. And furthermore, she realised, the President of the United States had just said something to her and she had no idea in the world what it was. She made her smile an apology. 'Forgive me. I came in such haste, I've hardly caught my breath.' Luckily, it was time for them to cross hands and part, and when they met again she had herself well in hand, ready for the necessary social exchange of nothings.

The next dance, inevitably, was Scarbrough's and here she was profuse in her apologies for their lateness, and animated in her description of Hyde's absurd suggestion that she wear sapphires with a green dress. Scarbrough gave her, she thought, a strange look, but then he was so obviously keyed up this evening that his looks were beyond interpretation.

The entertainment was incredibly lavish. When the signal was given to move through to the long dining-room behind the ballroom they found champagne running like water, and a luxurious display of cold meats, made dishes and shivering desserts laid out among a thicket of greenery. Trying to remember when

she had eaten last, Juliet realised that it had been at breakfast. Or had Anne made her take something while she was changing? At all events, she was starving, and delighted to accept a lavishly loaded plate from the devoted hands of Mr. Jay. Congratulating him on the house, she was aware that already a large proportion of the men had slipped away. No doubt, somewhere downstairs, more solid food, and drink, was being served to them.

'I don't believe a word of it,' Jay was saying.

'I beg your pardon?' She sipped champagne cautiously and looked at him over the glass.

'He'd never sell my house.' And then, aware of her amazed expression. 'You mean you've not heard? He's not even told you?'

'Mr. Scarbrough?' What an extraordinary moment to have chosen.

'No!' Explosively. 'If it was only that, I'd understand. No, madam, not Mr. Scarbrough, Mr. Purchis. I am informed on the very best authority that your husband is putting your town house up for sale. My masterpiece. Designed from my heart!' A languishing glance told her why. 'This is nothing — a showpiece. But your house, Oglethorpe Square! I'll never do anything to touch it. How could I?' Another languishing glance.

This was getting to be too much. 'Tell me, Mr. Jay,' she made her voice ice-cool, 'Who was your "best authority"?'

'Why, Mrs. Broughton. Your husband danced the first dance with her, you know.'

'Yes, so he did. And there, by happy chance, she is. Forgive me, Mr. Jay, if I consult the "authority"?' For once she was grateful for the awkward custom of buffet suppers as she bore down upon Mrs. Broughton, who had settled herself comfortably at a small table, two of her three daughters in attendance. 'May I join you?' Juliet took assent for granted and settled herself, straight-backed, on a stool in the corner beside Mrs.

Broughton. 'Mr. Jay has just been telling me the most amazing tale,' she went on affably.

'Oh!' Mrs. Broughton actually looked frightened. 'My dears,' to her daughters. 'I am sure Mrs. Purchis and I would trust you to choose our dessert for us.'

'Yes, indeeed.' Juliet had absent-mindedly cleared the loaded plate. 'And if there is any truth in this story Mr. Jay has been telling me, I believe I shall need another glass of champagne. Thank you, Lucinda, my dear.' What a mercy to have remembered the name of the youngest plain Miss Broughton.

'My dearest creature,' Mrs. Broughton leaned forward eagerly as her daughters began to push their way through the crowd towards the loaded buffet tables. 'You cannot mean that Mr. Purchis has not told you?'

'Told me what?'

'That he is putting the house in Oglethorpe Square up for sale. La, my dear, what creatures these men are for sure, but if you ask me, that is beyond enough. I'd make him smart for it, if I were you. And with a tale, too, of "extravagance", if you please. Why!' Even in these circumstances, her sympathetic glance was almost beyond bearing. 'If I've seen you wear that dress once, I've seen it six times. And very becoming it is too,' she added hurriedly. 'But, I ask you! Extravagance! We were saying, only the other day, my dear girls and I, what a model you had become. And after all — ' a very knowing look ' — the sapphires were quite your own, were they not? But, my dear — ' she leaned closer, so that Juliet could smell the peppermint on her breath, 'is it really true that he is closing out your account at the Planters' Bank? I tell you, I never heard anything so Gothic in my life. And taking you to rusticate at Winchelsea as soon as the President is gone. Though, mind you,' fairly, 'if the house is to be sold, I'd think you'd prefer not to be there to see it go.'

'You're right there!' It was true enough. She surged to her feet. 'And here, in happy hour, *is* my husband. Mr. Purchis,'

she made her voice shrill, 'Mrs. Broughton has been telling me the most amazing tale.'

'Amazing, perhaps.' Hyde smiled down at her. 'But true.'

'You're selling my house? The house Mr. Jay designed for me. For *me*.' She underlined it. 'And without a word to me?' She had actually almost convinced herself that she was in a rage with him. After all, he might have warned her.

'Well, my dear.' Hyde's expression was a triumph of uxorious apology. 'I did not wish to distress you before the party, but you must see, with our expenses.' An expressive glance took Mrs. Broughton into the secret of those expenses. 'We must cut our coat according to our cloth,' he added helpfully.

'And the servants! In Oglethorpe Square! What will happen to them?' This was not a question Josephine would ask, but she could not help herself. He had taken her, indeed, by surprise.

'Who knows? They have their freedom, after all; what more can they ask?'

'I do agree with you, Mr. Purchis,' Mrs. Broughton's voice was honeyed. 'I'm delighted to hear you have realised, at last, that there is a limit to what one can do for those creatures.'

'Oh!' Juliet was on her feet in a rush. 'I'll not stand it. My servants. That I've trained so they understand how we do things in France. And you'll let them go — just like that?'

'Well,' said Hyde reasonably, 'since we cannot afford to keep them.'

'You're intolerable. No, thank you, Priscilla. No dessert. But I'll have this.' She almost snatched the glass of champagne, and swept, holding it, clear across the room to where Judge James was holding court in the centre of a little group of ladies.

* * *

'I must say, Hyde — ' They were safe away at last, driving home through the warm darkness. 'You might have warned me!'

'About the house? I'm sorry, though mind you it made a much more convincing scene of it. And, besides, I'd hoped, until we got to Scarbrough's, that it would not be necessary. But while you were telling the President your cock and bull story about true-blue Scotsmen, Scarbrough was asking me for a loan. I only hope I can let him have enough. You won't mind, too much, being confined to Winchelsea for a while?'

'You know I'll love it. But, Hyde, the servants — '

He pressed her hand. 'I knew you'd rise to that one. You should have seen your splendid look of indignation. Josephine herself could not have done it better. Of course we'll take care of the servants, love. Besides, when the crisis is past, we will undoubtedly buy ourselves another town house, but something smaller, don't you think, and a trifle less pretentious? I always felt — ' he looked up at the looming shadow of their house as he helped her to alight from the carriage ' — that this one was more Josephine's than mine. Besides,' his hand was warm on her arm, 'I have my eye on a double lot, a little further out of town, where there will be more room for the children to play.'

'The? Hyde!' But Moses was holding open the big front door. There was no time for anything more. Suddenly, she found herself grateful for the friendly throng of servants waiting up for them, and, best of all, Alice and Anne at the head of the stairs, waiting to help her out of her ball gown. 'What an exhausting evening,' she smiled, a little tremulously up at Hyde. 'I'm worn to the bone.'

'And no wonder.' And then, for her alone as they mounted the curving stair, 'No need to look so frightened, love. If I've waited four years for you, since I met Josephine, I can wait four more days.'

'Four?'

'It's all fixed.' He paused at the door of her boudoir, and Anne and Alice tactfully withdrew to the further room. 'I talked to Mr. Kollock, the minister, this evening. The New Independent Presbyterian Church is to be dedicated on Sunday, you know, with Monroe and all the bigwigs there. It's not finished, of course, but you won't mind that, will you? We're to stay on, after the congregation leaves. Judge James will give you to me. You'll forgive me for not consulting you, but there was no time. I'm afraid you'll have an odd enough honeymoon of it, my poor love, with all the junketings for the President. I don't see how we can get out of the ball in Mr. Jay's pavilion, still less the trip to Tybee on the *Savannah*. But the minute he leaves for Augusta, we'll be off to Winchelsea.'

'And Aunt Abigail?'

'Let's cross that bridge when we come to it. For the moment, you're tired out, and tomorrow is another long day.' He laughed. 'I have to close your account at the Planters' Bank, remember. I got the necessary signatures from Josephine before she left. We'll not be on speaking terms, tomorrow, you and I. First I close your bank account, then I carry you off, neck and crop, to Winchelsea and sell your town house over your head. What a brute I am, to be sure.'

'Aren't you just.'

He bent and kissed her, swift and hard, on the lips. 'Good night, love. We'd best quarrel, I think, and keep apart. Sunday seems a thousand years off to me.'

'Ma'am—' Anne was waiting to put the emeralds away in their box. 'There's something Alice and I were wondering about.'

'Yes? What now.'

'Your name, ma'am. You surely won't want to go on being called Josephine for ever?'

'Oh dear,' she put an exhausted hand to her brow. 'How could I be so stupid? And what in the world will we do?'

'I don't know,' said Alice robustly, beginning to unfasten the

green dress. 'But I'm sure as Sunday Mr. Hyde will think of something.'

'Sunday!' said Juliet.

She slept the clock round and was eating a belated breakfast in bed when Hyde tapped on her door. How strange it was. She had inured herself, over the last months, to their travesty of married life. Now, as if this was the first time, she felt the uncontrollable tide of colour flush her cheeks as he bent to kiss her, lightly, good morning. 'You feel it too,' he smiled down at her. 'Strange, is it not?'

'Darby and Joan,' she managed.

'Well, not precisely. Lord, I nearly frightened you away that time, did I not?'

'Yes, I should have gone. Thank God I didn't.'

'Thank God indeed. But I'd have found you, somehow, once I knew I was free. And, talking of Josephine, there's news of her this morning. Or rather of her faithful crew of Frenchmen.'

'Oh?'

'Yes. It seems they got tired of waiting for her, and cut up a rumpus in Charleston. Half of them are safely lodged in the town gaol, and the rest have run for it. And of course they're all talking nineteen to the dozen, naming her.'

'As Madame de Joinville?'

'Not a bit of it,' cheerfully. 'As Mrs. Purchis. Poor Josephine, I was afraid she would not make much of a conspirator. Isn't it a fortunate thing she has that capable husband to look after her now?'

'Yes, but Hyde, you mean — '

'You're in more disgrace than ever today, love. We're going to have to throw ourselves on the President's mercy, I think. Isn't it a fortunate thing he's right here in town?'

'But, Hyde — '

'Don't look so frightened, my darling. It's not so bad as all that. After all, nothing has come of it. I've already seen Mr.

Calhoun and explained the whole thing to him — how I discovered what you were doing just yesterday — That was really why we were late for Mr. Scarbrough's party. I had already taken steps to buy in the *Liberty* and close your bank account. The sapphires, of course, you had given to that rascally crew of Frenchmen and we'll see no more of them — '

'But Mr. Scarbrough — '

'I've had a word with him, too. And I've done something else. I hope you won't mind it. I've announced that you are indisposed. You can see no one, go to none of the parties. In fact, I am being a brute of a husband and keeping you immured here, in disgrace.'

'Oh, bless you, Hyde. You think of everything. You mean I really don't have to see anyone, or tell any lies, all day?'

'My poor darling, not even a tiny one. You are free till Sunday, when you will meet Mr. Monroe at the consecration ceremony, shed a guilty tear, if you can manage it, and be forgiven. Oh, and by the way, I am so furious with you, I am telling everyone that in future I intend to cut your entire connection with those Bonapartes. I won't even call you "Josephine" but Juliet, instead, after my own mother.'

'Hyde! Was she?'

'Did you not know? And hers before her. And our daughter, next spring.'

'Really, Hyde!' Colouring more deeply than ever, she pushed ineffectively at the breakfast tray.

'Really, Juliet,' he picked it up. 'Must we, seriously wait for Sunday?'

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